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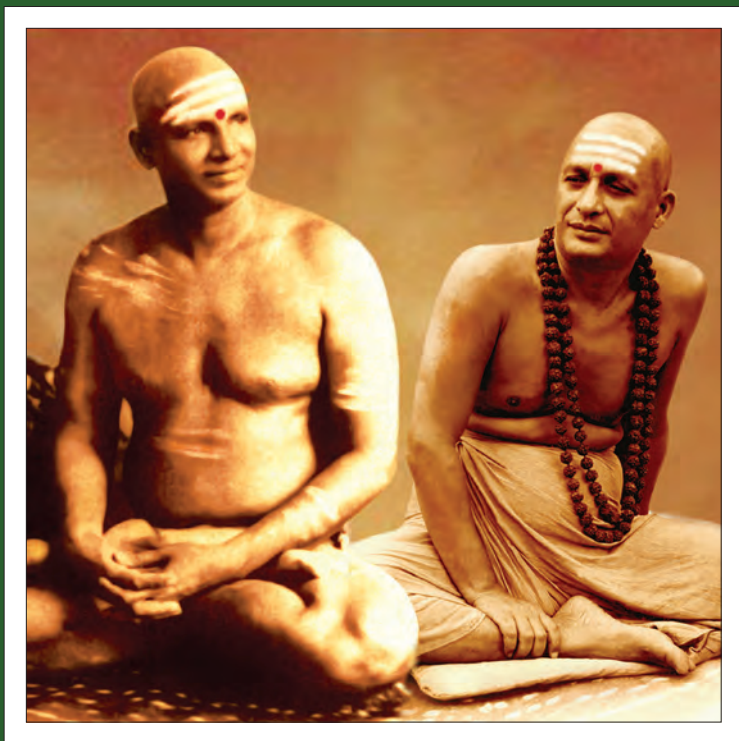
CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Karma Yoga Book 2

EXPERIENCE OF LIFE

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Karma Yoga Book 2

EXPERIENCE OF LIFE

BIHAR SCHOOL OF YOGA



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GOLDEN JUBILEE

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*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century,*

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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



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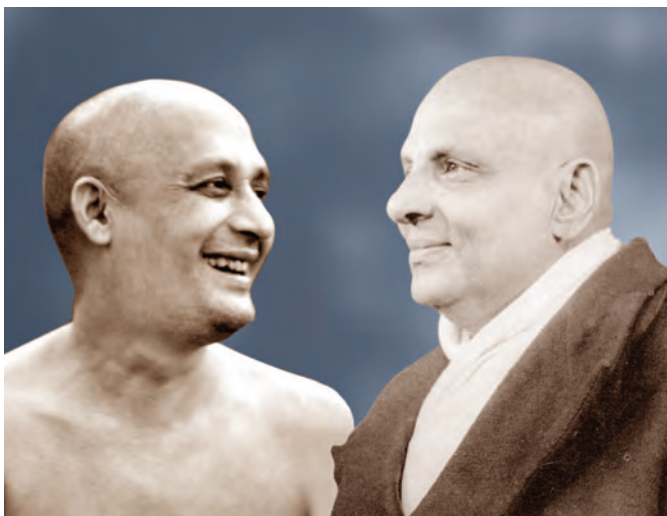
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh and Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of self-

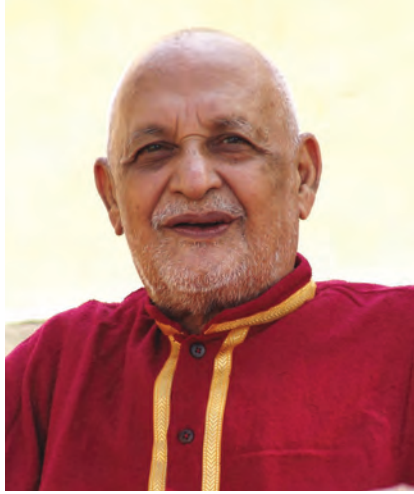


realized preceptors which ensures that the teachings remain fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

Following retirement from his role at the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda established Sannyasa Peeth for the development and training of sannyasins, and for his own pursuit of the higher sadhanas of sannyasa.

As the spiritual successor to Swami Satyananda, Swami Niranjanananda continues to inspire aspirants around the world.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Introduction

A contented mind is a continual feast. Contentment is one of the greatest virtues.

—*Swami Sivananda*

It is said that the human birth is difficult to attain, that it is precious and that even the gods desire it. Why? Because it is only through the human birth that one can consciously evolve, ultimately transcending the limited nature through self-realization. And yet, the experience of life is complex, often painful and fraught with duality. The desire for happiness drives and motivates actions and decisions about how to spend one's days and years, yet pain and suffering seem to regularly intervene. Peace of mind is elusive, contentment is short-lived, and underlying anxieties, disturbances and frustrations continually return, even when one's external life is safe and prosperous. How can suffering be overcome? If God is all-powerful and all-loving, why is there so much pain? If the purpose of life is self-realization, why is everyone so removed from that state? Is everything predestined or can the individual direct the course of his life? The philosophers and thinkers have much to say, yet the questions, theories and problems continue.

The yogic culture, being essentially practical, takes the matter beyond philosophy, offering a solution which is at

once pragmatic and deeply intelligent. This solution provides a practical system in which life itself becomes a method of yoga, a sadhana for evolution, a process that transforms mundane activities into opportunities for transformation. That system is known as karma yoga, the yoga of action.

The role of karma yoga

Karma yoga is the yoga that can be practised all day, whatever one is doing or involved with. The drama of life provides the materials for the practice: just as salt and water are needed for shatkarmas, and a peaceful place for practising pranayama or meditation, the events of life are needed for practising karma yoga.

In the process of practising karma yoga, one's interaction with life is examined and attempts are made to understand and manage the mental fluctuations and reactions. This inevitably brings one face to face with two universal aspects in the experience of life: the play of desire and the presence of suffering. The spiritual culture of India gives much attention to the roles of desire and suffering, placing a great deal of importance on how they are dealt with. It could even be said that from a spiritual point of view, one's management of desire and suffering determine the outcome of life. It is the view of many spiritual traditions that wise handling of desire is the key to liberation from duality, which is seen as the source of suffering. It is apt, therefore, that *Karma Yoga Book 2: Experience of Life* presents a close look at the wisdom of three modern yogic masters on these topics. In question and answer format, Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda explain complex ideas in simple terms and show how these driving forces in life can be used to further one's evolution and growth towards spiritual maturity.

The controversy of desire

Desire is a controversial subject. While many philosophies say that bliss comes when desires are eliminated, society is obsessed with promoting them as a source of happiness. The consumer

culture, which is fast becoming global, is based on constant and continual craving, both for material items and gratifying experiences. Many people do not know any other way of being in the world; they are completely caught up in a self-centred existence, based on the fulfilment of desires and devoid of skill in dealing with pain when it comes. In spite of the attractions of a life spent chasing desires, it is fundamentally flawed, as the gratifications are short-lived, the desires can never all be fulfilled and the inner life is neglected. Change, however, often comes in the form of a crisis, and a search for a new way of experiencing life begins. At such a time, karma yoga offers a path to gradually balancing the outer and inner lives. It does not advocate denial of desire or denial of suffering. It accepts human nature and simply says, become aware, become a witness, observe oneself and see what happens next.

The method of karma yoga is to use the attributes of the human birth as the means to lifting oneself to higher levels of consciousness: the characteristics that so often pull one down need to be purified, not denied. Desires can be pure and impure, blindly followed or managed. The energy of desires can be squandered in sensual living or sublimated and channelled for spiritual purposes. Swami Satyananda realistically advises, “Instead of trying to eliminate or avoid desires, it is better to change the quality of the desire.” As one progresses on the spiritual path, the nature of desire changes and desires as one knows them gradually drop away. According to Swami Niranjanananda, “In yoga, desires are not just blindly followed, but rather used to uplift the personality. The only indication that exists in yoga to measure the progress of spiritual development is the reduction of desires. As one evolves spiritually, the desires become fewer and fewer.” This process is facilitated by the practice of karma yoga.

Suffering as a path to liberation

No one wants suffering. Yet the yogis say that suffering should be welcomed, not rejected. Pain and evolution, they

say, go hand in hand. Swami Sivananda is straightforward about this, declaring that, “Misery is a blessing in disguise. Misery is the eye-opener in this world. Every suffering, every pain, every adversity moulds one little by little into the image of God.” This can be a difficult concept to grasp; common notions are being turned on their head: the desires, the things that appear to bring happiness, are to be reduced, while suffering, a state of pain, is to be welcomed. *Experience of Life* looks at suffering from a number of angles, bringing helpful perspectives to this important but confusing aspect of living. What are the causes of suffering? What is the relationship between pain and evolution? How should ill health and disease be understood? What is the yogic approach to crisis?

Quotes from scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Yoga Vasishtha*, *Ramayana* and the Holy Bible, as well as verses from the mystic poets, Mirabai and Kabir Das, lend their timeless resonance to the words of the modern seers. For example, in the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:23), Sri Krishna advises Arjuna:

Let severance from union with pain be known by the name of yoga. This yoga should be practised with determination and with a non-despondent mind.

Thus he explains that it is identification with suffering and a weak mind that cause pain, declaring yoga to be the way out of that state.

Destiny and free will

When people suffer, they often wonder what they did to cause such misfortune. They wonder if it could have been avoided or was it their destiny, and therefore out of their hands? If fate or destiny prevails in life, then what of free will? What can be done to improve one’s lot if all is predestined? *Experience of Life* investigates these questions of destiny and free will from the yogic point of view, including the place of astrology.

The concept of karma is intimately connected with ideas about destiny and free will. Karma is often taken to

mean that every occurrence in life is predestined due to deeds done in past lives. On closer inspection, however, this is not logical, as free will must have prevailed in the doing of those past deeds. Far from being a fatalistic theory, Swami Sivananda states that, “The doctrine of karma is diametrically opposed to the doctrine of fatalism. Rather, it is an incentive to act in order to better one’s condition as it presupposes freedom of will. Freedom is the essence of karma, which gives opportunities for growth and evolution.”

This freedom is fundamental to the practice of karma yoga, which is based on the belief that one can move beyond conditioned reactions so that behaviours and actions are conscious and performed without attachment. By performing actions without attachment or identification with them, one does not accumulate further karmas from those actions. This simply means that one’s mind is free of entanglements arising from actions and interactions. The responsibility rests with the individual to manage their desires, to learn from suffering, to discover how to base thought and action on a higher level of knowing, and so gradually bring oneself into alignment with the divine nature. The experience of life can only become a pathway to liberation when it becomes a conscious process, so that choices can be made with awareness and discrimination.

The philosophy of karma yoga is an optimistic one, viewing life as a platform and opportunity for upliftment. It says that through conscious and selfless management of life’s experiences, one can not only have success at the worldly level, but also connect with one’s deepest nature, which is spirit. In this way, through the process of life, harmony between the external and inner lives is attained.

1

Desire: Cause of Creation

ORIGIN AND ROLE OF DESIRES

What is the cause of desire?

Swami Sivananda: The cause of desire is the existence of outside objects. Curiosity becomes a desire in the mind. Interest and feeling precede a desire. Hope and expectation fatten the desire. Desires arise because there is no spiritual bliss.

What is the origin of desire?

Swami Satyananda: From time immemorial man has cherished one resolve deep within himself which cannot be uprooted, and that is the desire to become many. According to the Upanishads, man inherited this primordial desire from Brahman or Paramatma, who became bored being alone and sought to become many. This basic desire, therefore, is indestructible. Desires, wishes and cravings, *kamana*, *iccha* and *vasana*, are endless. Even the wish for *bhakti*, devotion, or *moksha*, liberation, is a desire. The form has changed, but basically it is one and the same wish.

Man is born into a physical body with desire, and nobody can say, "I am free from desire." Desire is born out of one's association with the objects of life.

What are the basic types of desire?

Swami Satyananda: Desires can be broadly classified into three or four types. The shastras say that man has three basic desires: (i) *putreshana*, desire for progeny, (ii) *dareshana*, desire for a partner, and (iii) *vitteshana*, desire for wealth. Normally people have the desire for wealth in the form of money, property, a car, house, building or farm. They have the desire for sexual gratification from men or women, and they have the desire for progeny, children, tribe, nationality and race. People think, “May I have a child”, “May my family prosper”, “May my tribe increase”, “May my nation become great”, “May my religion flourish” or “May I have many disciples.”

These are the three basic types of desire, but there is a rare fourth group, which is not developed in everybody. This is *lokeshana*, the desire for name, fame and power, seen in people such as Sikander, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler, and politicians. A person with this type of desire thinks, “May I become the Secretary General of the United Nations, or the President or Prime Minister of India or Greece or Italy or France.” This person may have the ambition to be a king, monarch or ruler; to be known all over the world, to construct or raise an edifice so that he is immortalized, to have books written about him, to have statues of himself erected or roads named after him. This fourth type is a refined form of desire, which only a few people have.

These desires are responsible for generating karma. The karmas give rise to destiny and are the cause of suffering and pain. It is, therefore, important that everyone understands these fourfold desires.

The first type of desire, for children, progeny, tribe and race, creates karma and brings about the chain of cause and effect. This chain goes on building itself, as the desire for progeny, family and tribe is an instinctive desire in humanity. Everybody has this desire deep inside. Nature has established this desire throughout the entire animal kingdom. Those organisms which do not have progeny through sexual interaction have still found a way to procreate. The desire for

progeny is rooted deep in the consciousness of man. Even if the children are a problem, the parents still want them. This is a result of compulsion by the force of nature. This is one source of karma which builds up in the course of time.

The second type of desire is to have a relationship with the opposite sex. This interaction is not only sexual, it is emotional as well. It includes all types of relationships, not only the intimacy between a man and a woman. It can be the relationship between a brother and sister, mother and son, or father and daughter, or friends. It can be in the form of friendship, marital relationship, or sexual relationship. This type of desire produces emotion and passion, infatuation, sexual attraction and attachment. This complete involvement of human attachment with someone is the second group of desires.

The relationship between the two sexes is guided by the laws of nature. Desire is instinctive, but sometimes it is also intellectual. Animals desire instinctively. During the infertile period animals live separately and do not come together. At the time of fertility, however, they come together under the compulsion of nature; they do not have to be brought together. Nature has provided refined smelling abilities which enable them to find a mate. In animals this coming together is guided purely by instinct, but in human beings it is also guided by the mind, intellect and desire. Desire in the mind is a conscious motion. When someone wants a boy or a girl, the person knows that they want this, but if the desire is analyzed, it cannot be understood because the cause is controlled by natural instinct. It is not possible that a person will not desire.

When two people come together, a family begins naturally. The first forms of desire are now interacting, helping and cooperating with each other. Many animals mate and separate immediately, like cows, horses and dogs, while other animals live together just for some time or for life. For example, birds live together for a certain period, tigers and lions live together for some time, but dogs do not care.

There is another important group of desires related to wealth, property, money, gold and precious objects. It might be a desire for a bank account, a big factory or industrial complex, many ornaments, or a nice car. In ordinary people this type of desire is for a house and money. In some special people it is for the acquisition of an empire or kingdom.

This form of desire is specific to human beings and is rarely exhibited in animals and birds. There are certain creatures, like rats, honey bees and ants, that store, but the larger animals, such as cows, deer, horses, buffalo and tigers, do not store. If leopards have a little extra meat, they dig a hole and keep it underground. Indian crows also have a tendency to store useless objects in their nests. Even so, the desire to acquire is not strong in animals and it is rare, but it is strong in man. In raja yoga it is called *parigraha*, which means acquisition, collecting and keeping.

These are the three forms of desire which propel everyone to do karma. Nobody is free from these three desires. There are hardly any exceptions to this rule. Those who try to find freedom from these desires through sadhana are wasting their time, for they will never be successful. I was never freed from the desire for progeny – instead of sons, I got disciples. I wanted to get away from money and wealth, so here I am sitting amidst gold and silver. These are the laws of nature, which cannot be avoided.

The longing for children, for prosperity, for sensual love are the origins of all other desires. These three create all desires, lead to action and cause the dualities, such as happiness and misery, achievement and disappointment. They suppress the yogic fire within a person. These are the desires which are the root cause of man's suffering and reincarnation.

What role does desire play in karma and in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one becomes aware of karma, one also becomes aware of what one likes and dislikes, wants or does not want. The entire interaction with life is based on what 'I' desire and do not desire. There is always

the expectation of results from the karmas. Three aspects are important when considering the role of desire in life: (i) identification with 'I' as an individual, (ii) attraction to the world of objects for satisfaction and fulfilment, and (iii) repulsion or rejection of that which is not desirable.

These three aspects continuously change and alter the perceptions of one's personality. 'I' identification changes the expression of the personality. Attraction and rejection change the expression of the personality. Linked with the identity of 'I', with attraction and repulsion, is the desire for a satisfying result. If the result does not culminate in satisfaction and fulfilment, another form of craving arises to take the place of the first desire, another way to attain satisfaction and fulfilment in life. This is the realm or dimension of karma.

There are three faculties in every human being, known as *iccha shakti*, *sankalpa shakti* and *kriya shakti*. Every creature in creation is motivated by desires, which give the will to think, to act and to move. In the absence of desire, one cannot become anything. The whole of life revolves around desire. Desire is represented by *iccha shakti*: 'I want, I desire to have it, I wish to possess it.' When one sets one's will on the attainment of a particular desire, it takes the form of *sankalpa shakti*, one-pointed awareness, one-pointed desire, one-pointed will. The motivating process, the force which enables one to carry out the achievement that has been resolved upon, is known as *kriya shakti*.

What are the two aspects of desire?

Swami Niranjanananda: Desire has two aspects: one is positive desire, which is conducive to the development and growth of the total human personality, and the other is negative desire, which is detrimental to expression and growth. The yoga shastras say that negative desires are the *bahya vrittis*, external vrittis, which direct the attention and perception to the gross material plane, inhibiting the expression of the faculties and energies which are inherent within. At the same time the *antar vrittis*, inner vrittis, the subtle desires or motivating

forces, are conducive to the attainment of perfection. Sage Valmiki says in *Yoga Vasishtha* (1:3:11):

*Vaasanaa dvividhaa proktaa shuddhaa cha malinaa tathaa;
Malinaa janmano hethu shuddhaa janmavimaashinee.*

Desires are of two kinds, pure and impure. The impure desires are the cause of transmigration, while the pure desires serve to destroy it.

In the course of human evolution, the gross desires distract the individual from the attainment of perfection. Yoga says that perfection is the result of the ultimate union between the faculties of body, mind and spirit, the union of the individual atma and Paramatma. The positive and negative desires are the attributes which give the experience of 'being here now'. Something is liked, something is disliked. Something is accepted, something is rejected. This is the general trend. At some stage in life there comes a recognition that this process is happening, and an effort may be made to sublimate gross desire, *bahya vritti*, into the experience of *antar vritti*, subtle desire. At this change-over point the journey into spiritual life begins. The particular *vritti* which is at present extroverted can be transformed by making it more introverted, subtle and aware.

Where do desires originate?

Swami Satyananda: Desires are the mental invocations that one makes. The body does not have desires, nor do the *karmendriyas*, the motor organs, or the *jnanendriyas*, the sense organs. They only have the power of action and perception, but no volition or will. The *karmendriyas* have the power to act, the *jnanendriyas* have the power to perceive. They have the capacity of physical experience, like the experience of heat and cold or good and bad, but willpower does not reside in the *karmendriyas*, *jnanendriyas* or the muscles of the body. Willpower and emotions are only in the mind. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:54:2):

*Anantasyaatmatattvasya sattaasaamaanyaroopinah;
Chitashchetyonmukhatvam yattatsankalpaankuram viduh.*

Desire or will is situated in the mind or mental part of the one eternal, universal and spiritual substance of God.

Why are desires important?

Swami Satyananda: Desire is a normal action of the brain. Not having desire is an abnormal action of the brain. The brain is a progressive organ which is able to leave many primitive things behind and develop new areas and new objects of experience and cognition. Every time the brain learns something new, the person desires something new. A hundred years ago people thought about acquiring a good horse and cart; now people think about acquiring a good car. After a hundred years, people may desire a small two-seater aircraft. The desire is the same, but the objects differ. Such desire is normal and to be without desire is abnormal. In the Bible (Proverbs 13:12) it says:

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

Most people have many desires. Some people appear to have no desires due to certain fears, suppressions or shocks which they have received or which they don't know about consciously. This means the karmas and desires exist, but they are in a suppressed state. Sometimes the mind and brain react to certain experiences in life by suppressing desires. In this case the desires go into the background and may never arise.

What is the function of desires in life?

Swami Satyananda: Desire is the most important thing in human life; it is the identity of man. Desires are necessary because they are a recognition of life. Through desire one can come to know one's personality and situation in life. There are some people who cannot desire, and others who

desire all day long. Through proper analysis, one will come to know that desire is an innocent force in the mind. In childhood one desires toys, in youth friends, then a job and money, family life and children. Later one desires position, name and fame, then mental calmness, peace, yoga, relaxation, meditation and God-realization.

In vedic philosophy, life is based on four aims: *artha*, motivation, *kama*, desire, *dharma*, duty, and *moksha*, liberation. Desire is one of the basic elements of a good life. One cannot evolve without it. If desires were eliminated through the process of yoga, everything would be destroyed. What would it be like if everybody in the family, city, country and world were free of desires? Of course, this is not going to happen, but if it were to happen, there would be many more problems. If there is no desire, something is wrong somewhere. A person who is unable to desire is either a liberated sage or abnormal.

Nature or God has created suffering, and there must be desires along with suffering. There must be the desires for a family, children and a nice home. There must be the desire to have a guru, to practise yoga, to have plenty of time to read the Upanishads, *Bhagavad Gita* and other philosophies. In life there must be desires, and desires bring suffering.

In life there is a lot of suffering, and this brings a person nearer to the inner self. Those who don't believe this should read the lives of saints. There must be suffering, as suffering opens the inner eye. A person who has no desire has no suffering, and a person who does not suffer cannot evolve spiritually. All the saints have suffered. Christ was crucified and Mahatma Gandhi was shot. Suffering makes one strong, but suffering is a product of desire.

How do desires change?

Swami Satyananda: Desire is an expression of one's personality. Desire is a manifestation, quality or particular state of mind. When the mind is sick and ailing, insecure or hungry,

there will be more desires. When the mind is completely satisfied, healthy and secure, the desires will be less. Desires are relative, and they keep changing according to a person's situation, development, age and experience. When a person grows tired of one desire, he automatically goes to another.

Desires are present in all the stages of life: brahmacharya ashrama, grihastha ashrama and vanaprastha ashrama, but the objects of desire change according to one's age. In childhood one desires games and sports, like cricket and hockey. In youth one desires wealth, women and progeny. In the later years one does not have the same desires.

What is the process of expressing desire?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the course of life, the subtle ideas, desires and thoughts manifest themselves at the gross level. There is an intimate link between the subtle mind, the nature which is more subtle than the mind, consciousness, and the visible world of objects and senses. There is a flow of information which comes from the consciousness to the mind and into the body. The body is simply a medium through which the mind expresses itself. Therefore, it is important not to differentiate between the thinking nature and the acting instrument, which is the body. Instead, it needs to be seen as the flowing stream of an idea coming from the subtle, the invisible, to the manifest, the visible.

Here is an example: an idea evolves at the deepest levels of one's nature; the idea becomes a desire, the desire creates a plan of action, and that plan of action is later implemented by the senses and the body. The instinct of self-preservation gives birth to desire. The interaction between the external world and the senses creates the cycle of idea, desire, motivation and implementation. This concept is related to *ahamkara*, the ego principle or 'I' identity. The concepts in life originate in the dimension of the 'I' identity, the nature of individuality.

At a later stage this concept filters down to the lower levels of the mind: the intellect, memory and reflective

processes, and is identified as a desire or need. This desire or need is then linked with one's aspirations, strengths and weaknesses. It takes a definite form to fill the vacuum that is felt when one engages in self-reflection. Desire simply means a wish to attain something that is felt to be lacking at present in one's life. How is this lack identified? An intricate process of analysis happens at the unconscious level, where the subtle mind, the ego principle, observes and analyzes the needs, which one then tries to fulfil in the course of life.

The concept is converted into desire, desire is converted into a need, the need is converted into an action, and the action is converted into a result. In this process, consciousness, mind, senses and body work as one integrated unit. At present, there is no direction to the flow of mental energy and no control over the channelling of the mental forces that manifest in the body. There is internal confusion, psychological confusion and unconscious confusion. However, there is no awareness of this internal confusion until it comes to the forefront of the conscious mind.

What is the state of pure bliss?

Swami Sivananda: Desire excites the mind and senses. When desire is gratified by enjoyment, satisfaction, *tripti*, is temporarily experienced. The cause of pleasure is desire. Without desire there can be no pleasure. It is said in the Bible (Proverbs 27:7):

He who is sated loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet.

When there is no hunger, delicious food can give no pleasure. When there is no thirst, a refreshing beverage will have no effect. So, hunger is the best sauce! The first cup of hot milk gives pleasure, but the second cup induces disgust. After the enjoyment is over, the feeling of satisfaction comes. Hence, disgust arises when the second cup is taken. There is no real pleasure in milk. The happiness is in the atman only, but it is reflected in the object (milk), owing to ignorance, or

bhramanti, illusion; it is *bhramantisukha*, illusory pleasure. If there were real happiness in milk, it would induce pleasure always and in every person, but this is not the case.

A desire arises in the mind and it creates a *vritti*, mental modification. This *vritti* agitates the mind until satisfaction is gained through enjoyment of the desired object. There is *shanti*, peace, or happiness after the enjoyment is over. Then another desire arises in the mind. Now, in the interval between the gratification of one desire and the manifestation of another there is pure bliss, as there is no mind at that point. The mind is at rest, and one is in union with Brahman. That state of pure bliss in between two desires is Brahman. If one can prolong that period of bliss through *sadhana*, by keeping up the idea of Brahman and not allowing another *vritti* or desire to crop up, one will be in *samadhi*. The period in between one *vritti* and another is the real *sandhi*, or juncture.

What are the tantric aspects of bhukti and mukti?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one comes into this world the senses, mind, intelligence and emotions become the dominant factors to realize life. In the process of realizing and experiencing life, the senses and mind find sense objects with which they attach themselves and associate. The association of the senses and mind with sense objects gives birth to the sense of pleasure and disappointment. The entire drive in life is to discover pleasure, fulfilment and happiness, which is directed by desires. Whenever a desire appears in the mind, it indicates that something is lacking within.

In order to fulfil that absence, a desire comes forth. With the desire begins the process of acquiring what is desired. Desire becomes the cause of associating with the world of sense objects, and this association gives birth to the experiences of happiness and suffering. This process is known as *bhukti*, the enjoyment of happiness, contentment and bliss, but at the same time one is subject to the influences of pain, suffering and distress.

The drive to experience happiness exists because it has never been experienced, and therefore one constantly seeks happiness. If the drive is to attain peace, it is because peace has never been experienced. It has remained a concept. Bhukti or enjoyment combines absence and attainment. The bhukti state of receiving the negative and the positive is one aspect of tantra.

The other aspect of tantra is *mukti*, liberation or freedom. There is also an innate desire and drive to free oneself from the limiting and restricting bondage of one's expressions, to become more efficient, creative and whole. The concept of mukti allows the positive virtues to surface, and one experiences the flowering and creative nature of life. The purpose of spiritual traditions is to move from bhukti, material involvement, towards mukti, total freedom of the self, to move from material identification and enjoyment towards freedom and transcendence.

Is there a difference between spiritual and other desires?

Swami Niranjanananda: Desires are desires. Both spiritual and worldly desires are born out of a need for fulfilment. If there is no need for satisfaction, there will be no desire. Desires only indicate a need for satisfaction in a person's life. Whether the attention is in the direction of material gain or spiritual gain is another matter, but desires provide a motivation for one's actions. Appropriate desire combined with action leads to fulfilment. The question is how to guide and direct the desires: that is the real training.

VASANA

What is a vasana?

Swami Sivananda: *Vasana*, deep-rooted desire, is a wave in the mind-lake. Its seat is the *karana sharira*, causal body or seed body. It exists there in the form of a seed and manifests in the mind. Just as flowers are latent in seeds, vasanas are latent in the *antahkarana*, mind, and the *karana sharira*. New flowers

blossom daily and then fade within a day or two. Similarly, vasanas blossom like flowers one by one, come to the surface of the mind, generate *sankalpas*, or thoughts, in people's minds, and goad them to strive to possess and enjoy the particular objects of enjoyment. Vasanas cause actions, and actions strengthen the vasanas: it is a vicious circle. With knowledge of Brahman, all vasanas are destroyed. Vasana is the cause of mental restlessness. As soon as a vasana manifests, there is an intimate connection between the mind and the object. The mind will not retrace its steps until it gets the object and enjoys it. The restlessness continues until the object is obtained. The vritti flows towards the object until it is enjoyed.

How can vasana be explained?

Swami Satyananda: Vasanas are hidden desires. Vasana means the craving to live and the thirst for life. Everyone wants to exist, no one wants to become extinct. Although the desire for moksha may be felt, deep down in the subconscious mind no one wants their existence to cease. It is said in the *Yoga Sutras* (4:10) of Sage Patanjali:

Taasaamanaaditvam chaashisho nityatvaat.

There is no beginning to them and the desire to live is eternal.

This sutra describes the source of vasana. The deepest vasana in everyone is to exist forever, for all time, and to maintain a sense of individuality in all of one's life forms. Vasana is the bed on which the *samskaras*, impressions, and the karmas are formed. It is said in the *Yoga Sutras* (2:9) of Sage Patanjali:

Svarasavaahee vidusho'pi tatharoodho'bhiniveshah.

Abhinivesha, fear of death, is the desire for life sustained by its own force which dominates even the learned.

The monk Totapuri, who initiated Ramakrishna Paramahansa, asked him why he smoked a hookah. Ramakrishna

replied, “In order to live one needs the link of vasana.” Similarly, a kite must have a thread in order for one to fly it. If the thread is cut, the kite is lost. As long as there are vasanas, the desire to live and the attachment to the latent samskaras of the past or present exist. If there are no vasanas, existence is finished. Such a person is a liberated being who flies away from the body. Existence depends upon a person having vasanas in relation to objects. Vasanas cause clinging to this existence, but once removed, one by one, a person cannot exist any longer.

The process of accumulating impressions is without a beginning. It is eternal, hence vasanas are called *anadi*, beginningless. They are the latent impressions of desires and they manifest in the form of desire whenever an opportunity arises. The beginninglessness of vasanas is proved by the eternity of the will to live, which is found in all living beings from birth. There is no creature that is free of the will to live. Hence, vasanas are beginningless.

What is bondage?

Swami Sivananda: Avidya, ignorance, *kama*, desire, and karma bind one to this wheel of birth and death. The real, essential nature is forgotten. There is ignorance of the *satchidananda swarupa*, the form of truth, consciousness and bliss. Therefore, it feels as if happiness lies in the external objects of the senses and desire arises for them. Exertion to obtain the objects of desire results in karma, which brings about birth and death.

It is the vasanas in the mind that cause attraction towards objects and brings about bondage. With the disappearance of vasanas, bondage naturally vanishes. Therefore, in order to free oneself from birth and death, one must free oneself from desires, attachments, impure vasanas, and ultimately, from this primordial ignorance. In *Yoga Vasishtha* (5:17:5) it is said:

*Baahyaarthavyasanochchhoonaa trishnaa baddheti raaghava;
Sarvaarthavyasanonmuktaa trishnaa mukteti kathyate.*

The desire to enjoy external objects is verily the bondage of the soul, while indifference to worldly enjoyments constitutes freedom in this living state.

What is the difference between desire, vasana and craving?

Swami Satyananda: There are various levels of desire in the human mind: desire for food and sleep, desire for money and property, desire for a husband or wife, children, friends and relatives, desire for love and affection. 'I want this' and 'I want that' is desire. One is aware of the ordinary, simple desires on the conscious mental plane, but there are hidden desires deep within which project themselves directly and, more frequently, indirectly. These hidden desires are known as vasanas. Apart from desire there is craving, which remains even when a person is drugged or when the frontal lobes have been removed in an operation. There is craving in a person who is unable to desire, plan or respond. Craving is instinctive and it is in everyone, whether one is intelligent or not. Small babies and children show the symptoms of craving.

What is the difference between vasana, samskara and karma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Vasana means deep-rooted desire. Samskara means an impression or conditioning of consciousness which expresses itself in this life. Karma means the result of an action which one is going to experience.

Desires come at any time, either to please the senses, or due to a need or the desire to own and to possess. One may look at a beautiful, fragrant flower and desire it. When the desire to have and appreciate the flower becomes intense, that is known as vasana. One may be in love with somebody and that person becomes the object of continuous attention. That is also vasana. One may be a workaholic. The desire to remain busy and engaged in work all the time is a vasana. Vasana is a desire, and it is an expression of the mind which is manifesting in the body and personality.

A samskara is an impression, like a genetic imprint. In each life one adds to the samskara, information or imprint. It becomes dormant, but it is there in the form of memory, experience, performance and the ability to work, think, understand, act and react.

When these samskaras become manifest, they become the *swabhava*, one's expressive nature. The information, the maturity, the advancement towards spiritual awakening which one attains in life becomes part of the body of samskaras. Samskaras represent the process of evolution.

The theory of evolution means a process of continuous growth, development and advancement. Whether it is a spiritual belief and philosophy or a scientific belief and understanding, both accept that there is a forward movement in time and space of human consciousness. As there is this forward movement of human consciousness in time and space, each block of experience represents a samskara.

Karma is the outcome of something one has done in the past. If one puts a finger in a fire and the fire burns the finger, it becomes charcoal. That is the karma of putting a finger in the fire. If one is absolutely thirsty and gets a drink of cool water, the sensation, satisfaction and enjoyment is the karma of drinking cool water when one is absolutely parched. It seems that karma takes one away from the source and point of origin. The ultimate aim of karma, however, is to bring one back to the source or origin. Karma is the motive, the dynamic force of destiny.

What does the battle between Ravana and Rama illustrate?

Swami Satyananda: Craving is an important aspect of the mind, and there is a well-known story which illustrates this. Rama, the banished prince of Ayodhya, invaded the empire of Ravana in Lanka. Ravana was a Brahmin, but he was known as a demon with ten heads. There was a big fight when Rama and Ravana confronted each other. Rama went on attacking Ravana, chopping his heads off one by one, but he couldn't finish the job, for by the time he chopped the

second head off, the first head had come back to life. Rama didn't know what to do.

At that point, Ravana's brother Vibhishana, who had been insulted by Ravana and afterward sought refuge with Rama, told him, "Ravana's ten heads always grow back and he never dies, because of a drop of nectar in his navel that gives him immortality. His entire system is constantly rejuvenated by the nectar, so that no matter how many times his heads are chopped off, they grow back again." Rama asked what he should do and Vibhishana replied, "The only way to defeat Ravana is to burn the nectar in his navel – then he will die." Rama asked, "How can this be?" Vibhishana replied, "No matter how many times one may kill desires, they will come back again and again, as long as there are cravings."

It is not the suspension of desire which is important, therefore, but the suspension of the primitive, instinctive cravings. Those cravings are so subtle that a person doesn't know what cravings he may have. Nobody ever knows what their cravings are, as they are such a subtle influence. In this room there are electromagnetic waves, but they can't be seen. Likewise, craving is a remarkably subtle phenomenon in human life. This craving is the nectar of vasana. The desires and attachments live due to this craving, and the individual lives and grows due to it.

How do hidden cravings come to the surface?

Swami Satyananda: There is an inner karma which is not known about. Deep within the mind there are cravings which one is sometimes aware of and sometimes not. A person has many desires, ambitions, passions and hatreds, but most people don't know what they are. When one faces the desired object, however, one thirsts for it. This is the great mystery of the human mind. A person may ask himself, "Do I have passions? No, I don't;" "Do I want money, do I crave for money? No, no!" but actually the desire is there.

There is a big gap between instinct and desire in the human mind. This must be realized. There are many instincts

in the mind that one doesn't know about. How are they to be expressed? For that purpose, nature has created desire and passion. If there is desire and passion, the instincts will be expressed, so they can be seen and recognized.

Many people talk about purification of the mind. If a person who has never been to the garbage room is talking about purification of the mind, what is going to be purified? Has that person been inside and does he know the instincts? What will be purified? In order to purify the mind, one has to know oneself. The purpose of this life of attachment, detachment and involvement is to develop understanding of one's instinct.

What is the relationship between vasanas and desires?

Swami Niranjanananda: Vasanas are inherent desires in everybody's life. Vasanas are also instincts. Sexuality is a vasana and also an instinct. Craving is a vasana and also an instinct. Fear is a vasana and also an instinct. Sleep is a vasana and also an instinct. These are the four broad categories in which all the different desires can be classified. They direct the actions, motivations and behaviours of every individual.

Progress in spiritual life is always indicated by the reduction or lessening of vasanas, or inherent desires. These inherent desires are related to the instincts, the craving for satisfaction and fulfilment, the need to procreate, the insecurities and fears which make a person feel he is losing his grip on life, and sleep or disconnection from the world.

What is the purpose of vasanas?

Swami Satyananda: The mind is made up of innumerable vasanas and is coloured by them. Vasana is the original, primitive unconscious vehicle of desire. Vasanas are the main incentive for creation on the lower plane, but they do not act on the higher plane of supreme awareness. Thus, it should be understood that the mind, which always clings to the

objects of the lower world, is full of attachments, sufferings, desires and so on.

Nevertheless, those spiritual aspirants who are tortured by vasanas and attachments should not feel pessimistic, as that same mind is not there for itself, but has *purusha* the supreme being, as its aim. The mind, although coloured by innumerable impressions and desires, is really there for *purusha*; it always works for *purusha* and is meant wholly for the purpose of *purusha*. The countless vasanas do not form the objective or purpose of the mind. For instance, when one eats, some portion of the food is retained in the body and the rest is eliminated, so the various dishes that are experienced are not the purpose of one's eating, or experiencing. Similarly, the chitta is not experiencing for the sake of the vasanas but for *purusha*, the master or objective purpose of the mind. The mind has so many vasanas only because it has to produce various experiences for *purusha*. It is said in the *Yoga Sutras* (4:24) of Sage Patanjali:

*Tadasankhyeyavaasanaabhishchitramapi paraartham
samhatyakaarivaat.*

Although the mind is variegated by innumerable vasanas, it acts for *purusha* because it works in association.

Aspirants should not feel depressed, therefore, when the vasanas work in the mind. They should understand that the ultimate purpose of the pilgrim is *purusha*. The various vasanas are ultimately serving an essential purpose of *purusha*. Life after life, birth after birth, the mind goes on migrating from one sphere of consciousness to another, from one plane of evolution to the next higher plane. Ultimately, there comes a point where it is able to reflect the seer and the seen, the knower and the known at the same time. Then there is an end to the vasanas, as they have served their purpose of creating *bhoga*, enjoyment or experience, for *purusha*.

Why does yoga emphasize the elimination of vasanas and samskaras?

Swami Satyananda: The mind, with the help of the senses in association with objects, creates an external sensual experience. Throughout life, all experiences during waking or during dreaming are an outcome of a combination of the mind, senses and object. It has to be remembered that the mind, object and senses themselves do not create an experience. For experience, there must be a seed, there must be *sankalpa*, determination, there has to be passion, *vasana*. If there is no karma, then the mind, object and senses can create nothing.

In the system of yoga it is said that the vasanas must be stopped in order to consume the samskaras, otherwise more and more will be supplied. Vasanas add to samskaras, and eliminating samskaras is hard work. As long as there are vasanas, how can samskaras be eliminated? And as long as there are samskaras, how can vasanas be eliminated? They are mutually supporting each other.

Therefore, through the practices of yoga one doesn't kill the mind, one doesn't kill the senses and one doesn't renounce the object; one only tries to roast the potential seed. In the *Yoga Sutras* (1:15) of Sage Patanjali it is said:

Drishtaanushravika-vishayavitrishnasya vasheekaarasanjnaa-vairaagyam.

When an individual becomes free of craving for sense objects which he has experienced as well as those of which he has heard, that state of consciousness is vairagya, non-attachment.

How do vasanas come to an end?

Swami Satyananda: Vasanas are beginningless, but they come to an end when their cause or support disappears. Cause and effect are bound together. Similarly, the substratum and the object are bound together, so if one disappears, the other will too. The cause of vasanas is the

kleshas: *avidya*, ignorance; *asmita*, awareness of 'I am'; *raga*, attraction; *dvesha*, repulsion, and *abhinivesha*, fear of death. The effect of vasanas is birth, experience and life. The substratum of all the experiences of life is *chitta*, the individual consciousness, and it is the substratum of the vasanas. The *alambana*, or basis, of the vasanas is the objects of enjoyment.

The cause (kleshas), the effect (life), the substratum (*chitta*) and the basis (*alambana*) of the vasanas go together continuously throughout the cycle of birth and death. If these four factors are removed, naturally the vasanas will also come to an end. If there is no cause, there can be no effect. Similarly, if there is no substratum or support, the object will not exist. If the kleshas are finished, there cannot be life, birth and experience, for these are the effects of the kleshas. If there is no birth, there can be no *chitta*. If *chitta* is not there, there is no support for the vasanas.

Thus, it can be seen that vasanas are dependent on these four factors. By the elimination of these four, the vasanas will also disappear. It is said in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (4:11):

Hetuphalaashrayaalambanaih sangriheetatvaadeshaam-abhaave tadabhaavah.

Since cause and effect, support and object are bound together, by their disappearance that also disappears.

PLAY OF THE MIND

Can desires ever be fully satisfied?

Swami Sivananda: The mind plays havoc through desires. As soon as a desire arises, the mind feels that happiness will be the outcome of its fulfilment. With exertion, the desire is achieved. With it comes a little satisfaction or gratification, *tushti*, but only for a short time. It is said in the *Mahabharata* (13:93:47):

*Kaamam kaamyamaanasya yadaa kaamah samridhyate;
Athainama parah kaamastrishnaa vidyhati baanavat.*

When one desire cherished by a person becomes satisfied, immediately there originates another whose satisfaction is sought and which pierces him like an arrow.

Again, the mind becomes restless because it wants new sensations. The feelings of disgust and dissatisfaction grow as the mind wants new objects for its enjoyment. That is the reason why the Vedantins view this world as mere *kalpana*, imagination.

Desires are innumerable, insatiable and unconquerable. Enjoyment cannot bring satisfaction, and it is a mistake to think so. Enjoyment fans desire, like pouring ghee on fire. It strengthens, increases and aggravates a desire.

What causes people to run after desires?

Swami Satyananda: Somewhere within the depths of one's being a person is crying. One has never seen this inner person and only knows the outer person. The person who presents himself during sleep and dreams has been seen, but that person who is beyond sleep has not been discovered. The awareness of man extends across these three bodies, but the consciousness also exists beyond these. The communication, however, between this mind and that consciousness has not been established. If it were, a sad little soul would be seen sitting in a corner crying. Why? His promise has been unfulfilled, and what he has been doing has not brought him any satisfaction. Man does not know his inner unhappiness. Sometimes he is happy; sometimes he is unhappy. But only this outer experience is known; the inner unhappiness is not known.

People are constantly running after external pleasures due to inner unhappiness. By indulging in pleasures, people try to cover up this inner sadness. Many great thinkers have spoken about this subject. Ramana Maharshi used to say, "Think it through well: Who am I?" But people do not understand. They do not know what self-realization means.

Self-realization means that one knows the depths of one's mind, the depths of one's being.

A person should know his complexes, inhibitions and ulterior purposes, and he should understand why he is weeping. Once a person withdraws his mind and goes deep into the depths of his consciousness, he sees the beautiful things there. Then that little soul becomes happy, and life comes into it.

Why do people search for happiness outside?

Swami Sivananda: The musk is in the deer's navel, but it runs here and there, looking for the source of the smell. The chain is on the damsel's neck, but she runs hither and thither in search of it. The precious diamond is within, but one runs after broken pieces of glass in vain. The ocean of bliss is within, the fountain of joy is within, and yet everybody runs here and there in search of it. The sun of suns is ever shining inside, but blind eyes cannot behold it. The eternal sound is ringing within, but cannot be heard by deaf ears.

Real happiness is within. It is in the atman. It is subjective and manifests when the mind is concentrated. When the indriyas are withdrawn from the objects outside, when the mind is one-pointed, when one becomes desireless and thoughtless, bliss begins to dawn.

How do desires dominate one's life?

Swami Sivananda: Man is a bundle of desires, cravings, emotions, appetites and thoughts. He is a conglomeration of desire, will and action, and he becomes extinct only if the fire of desire is extinguished. He thinks and acts to obtain the objects of desire. Thinking is the real action. He may sit quietly with closed eyes, but this is not inaction, as his mind may be working and planning. Wherever there is desire, wherever there is action, there is imperfection. A desire is the outcome of imperfection and finitude.

Man is finite, imperfect and full of limitations. He depends upon objects for his happiness. Swayed and

impelled by desires, he becomes a slave of desires and objects.

Desires dominate man and he turns his face away from God. He has forgotten his essential, divine nature and thinks he is a separate individual. If man kills his egoism and sense of separateness, if he annihilates desires and cravings, if he identifies with the Infinite, then limitations, imperfections and miseries will end. He will attain immortality and eternal bliss.

How does maya give birth to desires?

Swami Niranjanananda: The mind, thoughts, expectations and aspirations are guided by maya, the power of illusion. Even in the life of a spiritual aspirant, maya becomes strong. Swami Sivananda gives the example of people who have various qualities and skills. Somebody can be a musician, another can be an artist. Swami Sivananda says that when people with certain skills come to the ashram, they are given an avenue to express their skills. For example, a musician may have a good voice and be able to sing beautiful kirtans, so he is placed in the kirtan group.

After some time, maya takes over, in the sense that the singer begins to think he is a very good kirtanist. The song becomes a method to attract other people. Spiritual understanding or awareness disappears and music becomes a means to attract others, so that they will say, "Oh, this person sings very good kirtan." The musician begins to sing louder, thinking, "Oh, they like my song." This is an example of how maya can influence the mind without one realizing it. Maya affects the ego or ahamkara principle. When ahamkara, the ego identity and self-identity, is associated with maya, it gives birth to many other desires and expectations, known as vasanas.

What is the mechanism of desire?

Swami Satyananda: Desires are responsible for generating karmas, which generate destiny and are the cause of suffering. Attachment results from the enjoyment of desires.

Desires lead to actions, actions bear fruits, and attachment and aversion again arise from these fruits. This is truly a vicious circle.

The desire which the mind entertains is karma. The mind produces *sankalpa* and *vikalpa*, the process of thought and counter-thought, which are the two forces in everyone. When there is a great tug-of-war between *sankalpa* and *vikalpa*, there is conflict. Sometimes *sankalpa* and *vikalpa* become antagonistic to each other, and at that time schizophrenic behaviour arises.

Desires arise through *sankalpa* and *vikalpa*. When the desires are not fulfilled, and of course they never are, there is frustration. Whenever there is frustration, there is a natural tendency to become angry. When someone is angry, the mind becomes deluded, hypnotized, and loses sight of reality. The discriminating power is destroyed, and when that power is destroyed, everything is destroyed. This is also said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:62–63):

*Dhyaayato vishayaanpumsah sangasteshoopajaayate;
Sangaatsanjaayate kaamah kaamaatkrodho'bhijaayate.*

*Krodhaadbhavati sammohah sammohaatsmritivibhramah;
Smritibhramshaad buddhinaasho buddhinaashaatpranashyati.*

When a man thinks of objects, attachment to them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises. (62)

From anger comes delusion; from delusion, loss of memory; from loss of memory, the destruction of discrimination; from the destruction of discrimination he perishes. (63)

When a person introspects honestly, he recognizes that throughout life there has been desiring and desiring and further desiring. These desires are karma. Everything one does is the outcome of desire, for one has been urged by desire, pressured by desire. When the desire arises, one goes

to the market, buys pakoras, samosas and rasgullas and eats them. None of this would happen if there were no desire.

Even if a person doesn't know that he has desires, he still has them, but has tried to conceal them due to some peculiar psychological make-up. Not everyone is like this, but most people are to some degree. Every human being is born with desire, which is a manifestation of the ego. One can have the desire to lead a spiritual life, to commit suicide, to become a singer, a minister, an anarchist, an atheist, or maybe even to do nothing. Everybody is born with a desire, and whatever type of desire one may have, it is binding. Whether one is tied by a golden chain or a steel chain, it's all the same. A desire is a chain. A good desire is a golden chain and an evil desire is an iron chain.

The wise person must avoid these chains. Lord Buddha said, "What is the ultimate aim of desire? Every desire brings another desire. There is an endless chain of desires and no desire is ever satisfied." As a result one suffers from frustration and disappointment.

What is the difference between ambition and evolution?

Swami Satyananda: Personal ambitions are given to people by their wretched society, they are not inborn. In human beings there is a natural growth and evolution. Ambition is not a part of evolution. Evolution is always natural. A ten-year-old girl wants to become a young woman, but she can't; she has to evolve. Her ambitions will not make her a young woman or a lady. She wants to become a great lady and marry some youthful boy, but she is only ten so how can she do it? She has to wait, and this waiting is called evolution. Evolution is natural, ambition is not natural. Ambition is an outcome of a social system and social compulsion. It has nothing to do with nature, which operates according to the laws of nature.

If one goes through the path of nature, one goes in the right direction. If one goes according to one's whims and fancies, mistakes can be made anywhere. Follow nature. Accept what is natural and ignore what is not natural.

Is there a positive aspect to desires?

Swami Niranjanananda: By becoming aware of and understanding the desires, they can be changed into a strong positive force which can open the eyes to other realities.

Are there good desires and bad desires?

Swami Satyananda: The *mahapurushas*, saints, spiritual masters and godmen have said that the river of desire flows in two opposite directions: good and bad, auspicious and inauspicious. Everyone has thoughts which flow in good and bad directions. Where there are good thoughts, there is prosperity and happiness. People may have good thoughts for their near and dear ones, such as children and friends, but they also entertain bad thoughts about people they dislike. They think well of those who are nice to them and ill of those who treat them with disrespect.

Good and bad thoughts are the two reactions of the mind. This is not the real nature of the mind, but a reactionary nature. The mind has two natures, the natural and the reactionary. The mind is the supreme manager, the chief secretary, and good and bad reactions are its modifications. Therefore, it is best to leave the mind alone. One should not attack the reactionary mind for its desires, wishes and cravings. One should not hate desires or feel guilty about having them. Sometimes one feels upset at seeing one's bad thoughts, but this does not help.

Perhaps it is not so much a matter of good and bad desires, but of positive and negative desires. It can be said that instead of negative or destructive desires, it is better to have desires which are beneficial and fruitful. A positive desire is unselfish; there is more concern about the welfare of others than for oneself. A negative desire is selfish; there is only concern with one's own welfare and others are not considered. It's simple: if the desire is selfish, it is negative; if the desire is unselfish, it is positive. Desires can be distinguished easily in this way.

How do desires produce karmas?

Swami Satyananda: Karma is the rendering of desire into action. Karma gives a practical form to ambitions. The expression or external form of ambition is karma. Desire makes one work, so in that way it translates into karma. It is said in *Manusmriti* (2:4):

*Akaamasya kriyaa kaachidhrishyate neh karhichit;
Yadyaddhi kurute kinchittattat kaamasya cheshtitam.*

Not a single act here appears ever to be done by a man free from desire; for whatever a man does is the result of the impulse of desire.

Those who do not perform karma do not give free expression to their desires, which remain suppressed. The *Bhagavad Gita* explains that the ordinary person is motivated by desire, and so makes an effort to fulfil his desire. In his mind he hopes that the results of his efforts will yield his desire; that is karma. When he does not get the desired results, he becomes unhappy. If, however, he gets the results that he hoped for, he feels happy. Hence, karma gives happiness or unhappiness.

How does desire relate to action?

Swami Niranjanananda: If one analyzes everyday situations, it becomes apparent that behind every action there is a desire. The first function of the mind is the creation of desire. Without desire, the mind cannot exist. Desire is the first expression of the mind, and it is self-oriented: “I wish to attain, I wish to receive, I wish to acquire, this is my need.”

From the basic to the imaginative, one desires things that are either a need or a fantasy. Desires can be actual and also unattainable ambitions, but nevertheless they exist. Desires indicate the mood, the state of mind according to the guna predominant in the mind at that particular time.

With desire comes action, which is the second stage. When the desire is clear in the mind, actions take place

aimed at obtaining the desired results. Thus, life is a play of desire and action, desire and performance. There is nothing beyond the two.

What is the role of desires?

Swami Satyananda: Desires have only one role to play: they keep one hypnotized throughout life, otherwise the mind becomes rudderless.

When there is constant thinking about sensory objects, there is association with these objects. If the association with the objects is not wanted, one must stop thinking about them. There are normal and abnormal ways of thinking about objects. While living in the world, many things are needed and it is natural to wish to have them. Such desires are normal and natural; they are not constantly dwelled upon. A desire arises when it is necessary. The desires for children, money, a good job, a good home, good friends and good health are normal and natural, and should not be curbed. The process of life will become unbalanced if anything is done to subjugate or subdue these desires. The abnormal way of thinking about sensory objects is in the form of neurosis. Some people dwell constantly on one thought. When a person dwells constantly upon one desire, involvement with the object of desire takes place.

When the mind is not preoccupied, it occupies the person. When the mind occupies a person, it torments and molests him. When a person suffers from an illness, seventy-nine percent of the problem is mental, and only twenty-one percent has a physical basis. This preoccupation of the mind is necessary for mental, psychic and spiritual growth, and that is why God created desire. If there were no desire, there would be no preoccupation of the mind. Instead, a person would always be occupied by the mind, and it would play havoc. Therefore, God has said, "A person should fulfil his desires until he becomes detached, until he becomes a pure and true sannyasin!"

2

Desire: Enemy of the Wise

LIVING WITH DESIRES

What is the way to peace?

Swami Sivananda: Desire is the greatest enemy of peace. More wealth means more worry. It is not the objects of the world that bind, but the desires. The fulfilment of desires only multiplies desires. They can never be rooted out by feeding them. Unless one is desireless, one can never have peace. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:38–3:39) it is said:

*Dhoormenaavriyate vahniryathaadarsho malena cha;
Yatholbenaavrito garbhastathaa tenedamaavritam.*

*Aavritam jnaanametan jnaanino nityavairinaa;
Kaamaroopena kaunteya dushpoorenaanalen cha.*

As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, so is this enveloped by that. (38)

O Arjuna, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is unappeasable, like fire. (39)

Which branches of yoga help to manage desires?

Swami Sivananda: In order to tackle desires, practise the ashtanga yoga of Sage Patanjali, the bhakti yoga of Rishi

Narada, the jnana yoga of Shankaracharya, the karma yoga of Sri Krishna, or the yoga of synthesis, which is most suitable for this modern age.

How should desires be dealt with?

Swami Satyananda: The first principle is that one should fulfil one's desires. The second principle is that desire cannot be satisfied. Therefore, the third principle is that one must practise both. If possible, one should aim for fulfilment of desires and desirelessness at the same time.

Desire is an expression of the personality. If there is a dirty rag in a room, the foul smell cannot be killed by spraying it with perfume, as the source of the smell is still there; the dirty rag has to be removed. In the same manner, one should not try to reduce the desires. Instead, the aim should be transformation of consciousness, the very frame of the mind, in such a way that it automatically becomes desireless.

Instead of trying to eliminate or avoid desires, it is better to change the quality of the desire. Desires cannot and should not be eliminated. It is dangerous and it is not a good idea. One must have desires, otherwise there will be unhappiness. Desires can never be satisfied, and desires can never be suppressed or killed. If a person is thinking of killing his desires, he will never succeed. Desire can only be channelled or sublimated.

The law of nature shows one how to walk along the natural path. The three basic desires for sexual gratification, wealth and progeny are part of human nature, just like hunger, sleep and excretion. A human being must have an outlet for desires and passions. He must have food, a place to sleep, some security and something to fulfil his passions. These are the four primary instincts of every human being: *ahara*, food, *nidra*, sleep, *bhaya*, security, and *maithuna*, sex. At the same time, these basic instincts can be managed with proper awareness and regulation.

Swami Sivananda used to say that it is not possible for everybody to become free from desires, as desires are created

by the forces and laws of human incarnation. A balance has to be found, otherwise the whole structure of life will collapse. Life has its structure and evolution depends on that structure. If the structure is destroyed, there will be regression. If one doesn't have desire or ambition, there is no incentive. No one will work, and if one doesn't work, the mind will not improve. Therefore, desires and passions and renunciation have to be balanced properly.

It is also not good to become desireless before the maturity of one's spiritual practices. Therefore, one should try to minimize the quantum of desires only after going through the experiences of karma, after facing frustrations, disappointments and satisfactions, and realizing that these are part of life experience. Nevertheless, there is still something to be accomplished or fulfilled, not because of a desire to accomplish, but because the karma has not yet been worked out.

The best thing for a rajasic or dynamic person is to desire for others and not for oneself. This can be called selfless desire, when the self is not involved but there is still desire. There is thinking and wishing, but for somebody else, not oneself.

Desire is not an ordinary function of life. It is said in the *Mahabharata* (12:217:36):

*Soochya sootram yathaa vastre samsaarayati vaachakah;
Tadvatsamsaar sootram hi trishnaasoochya nibadhyate.*

As a weaver drives his threads into a cloth by means of his shuttle, similarly the threads that constitute the fabric of the universe are woven by the shuttle of desire.

Desire is the prevailing force. Compelled by desires, there are initiatives. Therefore, desire is a creative force. It should not be dealt with it in any way one likes. The easiest and best way to deal with pains and troubles or desires is to plan life; that is the systematic way.

The vedic tradition has a system, called ashrama dharma, in which the lifespan is divided into four *ashramas*, or stages

of life. The lifespan of the human body is one hundred years, and this is divided into four periods of twenty-five years each. There is also a second tradition called *vairagya dharma*, which means 'the inclination born of dispassion, which arises at a young age'. There are some children who have dispassion at the age of four, five, eight or ten. There are also people who marry at the age of eighty. Therefore, everybody has their own way of thinking, but this means that one has to plan one's life.

The person who wants to take the long way should listen and hear what to do. Go and join a monastery. Kill all the desires; curb them all. Whenever passions arise in the mind, take the Bible and read it. Whenever desires become overwhelming, say to the Lord, "My God! Please, help me." That is the long way: renouncing desires and praying to God for help. It is okay to pray, but don't fight with desire, because He created desire for everyone's good. Desire has two faces: one is ugly and frightening, the other beautiful and pleasant. One face of desire is called *Devi*, the divine Mother, the other is *rakshasa*, demonic.

Everyone should know what desire is, how to conduct it, and how to go beyond it. Is there any religion in the past or present which believes that *kama*, passion, can be used as a springboard for evolution? The truth of nature must be accepted, not because the vedic or tantric traditions are trying to justify it, but because the minds of millions of people could become normal through this understanding.

What is the difference between control and suppression?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a big difference between control and suppression in spiritual philosophy, not just in yoga, but also in tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya. The difference is that in suppression one is not aware of the reactions that may be taking place or that will take place later on, but in control one is aware. The key factor is awareness. Lack of awareness is suppression and having awareness is control.

Take food as an example. Suppose that after having spent one year in the ashram eating dry chappatis, rice and dal, a person goes out and sees a sumptuous meal. What does he do? He gorges himself! The desire for such food has been there all the time, but it has been suppressed in the ashram. So he eats till he is full, and when his stomach is bloated, he cries, "Oh, I feel so heavy, I feel sick, what should I do?"

When there is control, however, one eats with restraint according to the capacity of the stomach, being aware of the desire that has been suppressed during one's stay in the ashram. If it can be controlled, that desire governed by awareness does not create a problem. The desire has been there all the time and has been building up. Awareness makes all the difference between suppression and control.

Desires are always for some kind of self-satisfaction. Even desiring one's own development is selfish. Desiring to help others is still selfish. Desiring realization is also selfish. Desires can never be neutral or transcendental. Prayers to God are similarly selfish. Only the object of desire has changed from money to realization, from wealth and prosperity to serving others. The attitude has changed but the desire is still there, and desire is selfish.

It is necessary to change the attitude and perception, but this can only happen when one is not sunk in ignorance. The realization must come that the attitude needs to change. Instead of doing something for one's own fulfilment, one needs to do something to help others. It is the attitude of the ego which has to change.

The first step in this effort to understand the mental processes is self-analysis through the techniques of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Once one is able to understand what kind of thoughts, emotions, desires and experiences take place within, the attitudes can be slowly changed. Suppression will become control. Once that control has been developed, there will also be the ability to allow everything that is bottled up, emotions, feelings, ambitions, desires and so forth, to come out in a systematic and controlled way.

Why is it important to plan life?

Swami Satyananda: A person should earmark a certain span of life for the fulfilment of desires. Cities are planned and families are planned. Why don't people also plan their lives? The period from twenty-five to fifty years of age is considered to be the time when desires have to be properly worked out. This stage of life is known as *grihastha ashrama*. The shastras have been saying this for thousands of years, but still people feel that twenty-five years is not enough. They want to go on satisfying their desires up to the age of eighty or ninety.

Common sense says that the fulfilment of desire must follow the strength of the body. In middle age, after fifty years, the body begins to lose its strength. In old age the body becomes weak. Of course, desires never grow old! Cravings have no grey hairs! In old age the body trembles, but the cravings and desires never tremble. Desires and cravings are always in the prime of youth. A person may be eighty years old, but if the desire is asked, "How old are you?" it will reply, "Oh, I am young, sixteen years old." A young desire in an eighty-year-old body is not a nice combination.

Heart attacks and nervous breakdowns take place, as the body and brain cannot carry the load, pressure and demand of desire anymore. Desire compels a man of sixty to eat so much meat every day, but the physical body cannot digest it, so he ends up with many diseases, such as cancer, gastric ulcer, hernia, prostate problem, high cholesterol or coronary thrombosis.

It is important and scientific, therefore, to plan one's life. Nothing should be said against desires, for they are natural. There is nothing unnatural about desire, but every desire should be related to the condition of the body. When a desire is related to the condition of the body, it solves the problems.

What attitude should one have towards desires?

Swami Satyananda: In order to overcome desires, one should not fight with them. One should not hate or avoid them or

do anything in the spirit of animosity. One must befriend them; that is the first principle in spiritual life.

The psychological law is that hating one's desires and wanting to eliminate them creates a split in the mind. The same mind that desires is trying to eliminate the desire. One wants it and doesn't want it; this is called conflict. It is conflict between the ego and the superego. When this conflict is narrow, it only influences the day-to-day behaviour. When the conflict becomes wider, it becomes schizophrenia and one has to go to the mental hospital. Everybody in western countries is mentally split, as religion says one thing and the culture is completely opposite.

There is a great gap between the teachings of society and religion. A part of the mind is religious, as one has faith in it, and another part of the mind is social and says something else. Here is a gross example: religion talks about purity and chastity, but what does society teach? What does the psychology of Dr Sigmund Freud teach? Just the opposite of what religion has taught. In day-to-day life one lives in society and succumbs to it, but from time to time the religious beliefs come up and one feels guilt and thinks that one is bad. One enjoys but feels guilty about it.

Desires should not be curbed. By curbing desires, the opportunity to act is killed. For example, there is the desire to have a child. A wife or husband is needed in order to fulfil this desire, and a home, job, business and so many other things follow. This keeps the untrained mind busy all the time; this is how karma keeps the devil beat. The mind is a great force, a supramental force. If this force is not properly used, it will feed the wrong centres in the personality and perhaps become destructive. Therefore, nature has created karma. There should be no suppression or repression. If desires are knowingly suppressed, it is dangerous.

The shastras, classical texts and modern psychology affirm that desire and passion cannot and should not be killed. Freud has said in unequivocal terms that the suppression of desires and natural instincts leads to mental

sickness and neurosis. Suppression and repression are the cause of all diseases. Modern western civilization has grown out of this Freudian theory. Suppression of desires strengthens the hidden desires. These hidden desires project themselves in dreams, visions and meditation, and they manifest continuously in the different stages of meditation. Sometimes, in trying to suppress a vasana, a death blow is dealt to the personality. A person who attempts to extinguish his desires will never succeed.

A person can stop himself for some time by his intellectual force, but nature will not pardon him. There are certain natural desires in man which must be expressed, now or a little later; one cannot help it. In society there is an idea that one should not speak this way or act that way, but this is suppression. At some point one's entire life is going to explode.

As a result of this suppression, the evolution of the soul is retarded. If desires are suppressed, no progress is possible. If the desires were eliminated, no one would make any karma and man's psycho-spiritual evolution would come to a halt. In order to speed up the evolution of the soul, the best thing would be to let the soul function freely. Therefore, desires must not be curbed. Those who want to be free from desires had better try a positive method. They should either fulfil them completely or else realize their uselessness.

How can one experience true contentment in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are certain principles that guide the desires, aspirations and motivations. In yoga these are known as the SWAN principle. In order to be fully content in life, one has to know the SWAN theory. SWAN is an acronym which represents 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Ambitions and Needs'.

Every individual has his strengths, which can manifest in the intellect, emotions, willpower, clarity of mind and performance of action. They help one to move forward in life, providing the stamina to continue. At the same time,

everyone is subject to weaknesses which are experienced or felt, such as fear, insecurity, lack of self-confidence, lack of willpower and lack of mental clarity.

Ambition is the third aspect of the SWAN theory. Ambition can also take many forms, such as fantasies which are beyond one's strength and means to attain. Ambition is a motivating force. Some people desire the moon and others desire something which is simple to attain. Ambition is not something physical or mental. The Sanskrit word for ambition is *mahatvakanksha*, which means a desire that manifests in the realm of *mahat*, the greater mind, or buddhi. By the time it filters down to the level of rationality at the surface of the mind, it has been changed, shaped and altered by many other attributes, circumstances and situations.

The fourth aspect of the SWAN theory is need. The body, the emotions and the mind all have certain needs which are vital for their maintenance and sustenance. In order to have *santosh*, contentment, it is necessary to develop awareness and recognition of these four different aspects of the SWAN theory. When these four aspects of the personality are harmonized and balanced, contentment is achieved.

What is the importance of harmony in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: The inability to harmonize one's deepest, innermost thoughts or philosophy with one's actions and external thoughts is experienced at a certain stage of life. An individual's philosophy is based on some kind of spiritual or creative aspiration. The thoughts are based on external influences, and actions are based on the need and drive of the physical and mental senses. Most of the time one is unable to harmonize these three: action, desire and philosophy. A person's philosophy of life leads in one direction, where there is some experience of internal harmony. The desires move one in another direction, where there is external fulfilment. The actions performed in the pursuit of these two directions sometimes create conflict. The incompatibility between philosophy, desire and action is the cause of confusion.

Yoga aims at providing the missing harmony. Yoga is a means to integrate the faculties of head, heart and hands, meaning intellect, emotion and action. For many people yoga is a physical process, but for others yoga is a spiritual process. Whatever one's concept of yoga may be, in order to be efficient in life, there must be integration and harmonization of the actions which are performed, the desires which motivate, and the personal philosophy which guides an individual through life. When harmonized, these three aspects give the realization of dharma. After that, the karmas are altered and changed.

FULFILLING DESIRES

Why is it important to fulfil desires and ambitions?

Swami Satyananda: Fulfilment of desire and ambition is necessary for spiritual growth. Karma is necessary for spiritual growth. Karma is the rendering of desire into action. Karma is the action that gives a practical form to one's ambitions. A person has a desire and that desire makes him work, so a desire is translated into karma. The desires of those who do not perform karma remain suppressed.

Man is made up of desires. He cannot live without desires, but still he suffers from guilt. On account of this guilt, often he thinks that desires are not required and are no good, or he convinces himself that they are not present. So there are two types of people: those who just work and do not care for spiritual life, and those who only follow spiritual life and do not work. Desires, however, must be fulfilled in both types, otherwise they remain suppressed. If desires are suppressed, there will be no spiritual progress, no matter what meditation is done. The performance of karma is a process of eliminating the suppressed vasanas. As such, renunciation of desires is not tenable, even for a spiritual aspirant. A person's endeavour to achieve a spiritual objective depends upon his desire.

How do the gunas relate to vasanas?

Swami Satyananda: Nature has made certain conditions that are important for everyone. The soul evolves from the tamasic and rajasic states to the higher sattwic state. A person who is tamasic or rajasic in evolution needs vasanas. If a man is lazy and has no desires, he will become lazier. When a person is lazy or procrastinating, he should be injected with vasanas, which compel him to become active. He is not going to evolve at all without vasanas. Evolution is from tamas to rajas, not directly to sattwa. Therefore, vasanas should be stimulated in the tamasic state, while in the rajasic state they should be balanced, and in the sattwic state they should be eliminated gradually.

The presence of vasanas is necessary until one is established in sattwa. In one person the desire may be for alcohol, in another for wealth or name and fame. From what I have seen in different cultures people who have exhausted or overused their vasanas have developed spiritual awareness. Those who have not had the opportunity to fulfil their vasanas are finding ways to do so now. They are mad after them! People who do not suppress their vasanas, but fulfil them, develop a keen intellect and intuition in the course of time. Artists, poets and musicians are talented and gifted people, but their vasanas are quite surprising; sometimes they are just like animals.

Passion and activity, therefore, are really a means to higher awareness. They are not negative aspects of life to be suppressed. They should be used, especially in the earlier stages of development. The natural drives can help one's growth, so one should use them, and in the course of time try to transform one's activities into karma yoga.

How should desires be fulfilled?

Swami Satyananda: Most people have many desires and ambitions. In themselves these are not bad, but when one makes their fulfilment the sole purpose of life, the divine direction is lost. At this point, life becomes a cursory

existence full of frustration, dissatisfaction and unhappiness. People who are always looking outside themselves for pleasure and contentment never find it. This is why nobody is satisfied. Nowhere is it possible to find any satisfaction or peace in this world. Therefore, one must make one's own peace and one's own higher, simpler and satisfying life.

There are times when sensory pleasures should be fulfilled in order to work out karma. In this particular respect, one thing should be accepted without any doubt. The life of the senses and the mind is not anti-evolutionary, it is pro-evolutionary. Fulfilment of desires in life is a part of spiritual illumination, but at the same time, an aspirant must remember his purpose. This path of life is being followed for the fulfilment of a spiritual vision, not for the fulfilment of sensual life. All spiritual practices ultimately lead to the point of awakening.

Once the objective is clear, each and every aspect of life must be designed accordingly. The life one chooses, the religion one follows, the food one eats and so on should be in accordance with the fulfilment of this purpose. Similarly, the austerity, control and restraint that are practised must all have a purpose; only then can one ensure that life does not become an empty religious ritual.

Desires are not fulfilled in order to satisfy them completely, but to realize that they cannot be satisfied. As Swami Vivekananda said, "Desire is increased by desire." Vasanas cannot be satisfied; they are insatiable. There is no end to the gratification of vasanas, but this has to be experienced in order to be understood.

The aspirant has to transform himself in such a way that all the desires are present, but they do not cross a certain limit in the mind. He should follow the example of the ocean, which accepts all the rivers flowing into it but never overflows. Likewise, one should gratify the desires for a child, a woman or man, and wealth, but they should not be allowed to upset one's balance of mind in spite of living amidst them. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:70):

*Aapooryamaanamachalapratishthamsamudramaapah
pravishanti yadvat;
Tadvatkaamaa yam pravishanti sarve sa shaantimaapnoti
na kaamakaamee.*

He attains peace in whom all desired objects enter as waters enter the ocean, which filled from all sides remains unmoved, but not the man who is full of desires.

How should desires be regulated?

Swami Niranjanananda: In yoga, desires are not just blindly followed, but used to uplift the personality. In normal life, people blindly seek to experience contentment by fulfilling every desire, no matter how insignificant it may be. In the process of yoga, the desires have to be observed and analyzed. As progress is made in spiritual life, one learns to contain that aspect of human nature which craves fulfilment through whatever means possible. Desire is also influenced by social conditioning, culture, religion and so on. In creation, desire was the first link forged between divinity and humanity. It is also the last link which has to be broken in the process of evolution. If, however, one simply waits for this last desire to drop away, one may be waiting indefinitely.

To get to the mind, the desires and aspirations need to be managed and controlled. It is not necessary to get rid of them completely. Just as one prunes a tree continuously to maintain it at a certain height, so too the desires have to be managed in such a way that one can perform the necessary tasks appropriately and also fulfil personal needs. Desires that are not beneficial are pruned and those that are beneficial are maintained.

Spiritual development is measured by a lessening of desires. As one evolves spiritually, the desires and ambitions become fewer and fewer. With the reduction of desires, there is reduction of karma, and with this there is the experience of inner freedom. Taking charge of one's life is the goal of all the traditions that advocate realization, moksha, nirvana or samadhi.

Desires won't finish, but their grip on the personality, which forces one to look for emotional, sensual and intellectual fulfilment, will reduce. Reduction of desire means that one is not obsessed about a desire, one doesn't run after it or lose one's balance due to it. The involvement with desires gives birth to feelings of attraction and repulsion, possessiveness and rejection. The push and pull of duality, which arises as the result of desire, is the factor that creates confusion and conflict in one's priorities. The root cause of pain and suffering is not that one has desires – every living being has desires – but that one is aware of the desires, which are a strong force. Everyone has desires, even sannyasins. The only difference is that a sannyasin tries to become a witness of the desire while a householder is immersed in the desire. It is a change of mentality, feeling and outlook.

Stability in spiritual life, therefore, is not a question of transcending desire, but of knowing how to channel the direction of desire, as this leads to growth. It is not even necessary to be concerned with personal desires or aspirations. It is sufficient to have a goal, a focus, and keep on walking that path.

The aspirant should always remain true to the goal. It is like being on a journey and moving from one city to another. On the road one may stop many times for something to eat, as a result of accidents or to admire the scenery. The aspirant can stop as many times as he likes, but the aim is still to reach the destination. Similarly, once the aspirations and direction for life have been set, one should keep that aim in mind. The aspirant should continue to walk towards the fulfilment of that goal, and at the same time manage the desires as and when they manifest, by determining their usefulness for his own fulfilment and growth in life.

How should one answer wishes and desires?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are two methods. One method is introspection, reflection and deciding what one's needs are, knowing what one's ambitions are, learning how to manage

the weaknesses and utilizing the strengths. This is the SWAN principle or theory: strength, weakness, ambition and need. Most desires, likes, wishes and attractions fall under the jurisdiction of these personality traits. Often desires arise due to an ambition and often due to a need. One should be able to differentiate and discriminate between those born of a need, expectation or ambition.

There is no harm in following the wishes of the mind, provided one is aware that one is following the whims of the mind and provided one is able to contain oneself when the mind tends to go overboard. Meditation helps one to discover what the needs are and how to differentiate them from the ambitions. In the life of a spiritual aspirant, evolution of the self, the growth of human nature, can be determined by observing the lessening of desires.

As one evolves along the spiritual path, desires become less and the aspirant becomes more content. With lack of contentment, more desires will surface. This has been the experience of many practitioners. People want to be alone with themselves and not interact unnecessarily with others. Sometimes they feel threatened by these changes and don't like it, feeling isolated from normal life. But this is a natural outcome for those who meditate and practise pratyahara and dharana. There should be no fear. It is a stage of life which indicates some form of inner control, balance and purity.

The other way of dealing with desires, likes and dislikes is to ignore them and not be obsessive about them. To ignore desires, however, one needs to have a different kind of character, a firm approach to life and clarity about what one desires from life.

What are the ways to deal with the sexual urge?

Swami Niranjanananda: The Sanskrit word *brahmacharya* means abstinence from sensual pleasure. It is a combination of the two words *Brahma*, meaning the supreme self or consciousness, and *acharya*, meaning 'to follow in the footsteps of'. Those who follow in the footsteps of the supreme consciousness are

brahmacharis, or celibates. The concept behind this is that when the desire to attain self-awareness or self-realization becomes intense within, one has to let go of the attachment to sensory and sensual pleasure. Many people limit brahmacharya to the relationship between male and female, but that is not the meaning of brahmacharya.

There are two schools of thought, vedantic and tantric. Vedantic philosophy says that aspirants should practise austerity, *tapasya*, firmly committing themselves to a strict discipline and following it, and not giving fuel to the *vasanas* and *kamanas*, desires. One of the most powerful desires and the most difficult to overcome is the sexual desire. Since few have the ability to say 'no' to a sensual desire, vedantic philosophy advocates a total cut-off from this type of intimate relationship between man and woman, husband and wife, so that the physical act does not fuel the desire to have more and more, thus becoming lost in sensual pleasure.

According to tantric philosophy, sexual relationships are permitted, but with the mind directed towards the higher experience behind the relationship. It is not just the sensual or sensory experience, or merely a physical experience, but more of a psychic experience. When comparing the two different ideas of Vedanta and Tantra, one finds them contradictory, but regarding *sadhana*, having a normal, everyday relationship is more conducive to spiritual growth and development if an aspirant is able to follow the system outlined in the tantras. For those, however, who are weak-minded, have a weak nature and get caught up in the trivialities of life, the vedantic system is good.

Is there a desire that should always be sustained?

Swami Satyananda: There should be one desire which holds a person permanently, and that is the desire for self-realization, divine realization or enlightenment. The word desire is actually not used in this context; this desire is called *mumukshutva*, meaning the intense yearning for liberation. An aspirant should always keep this ultimate desire in mind

and should never abandon it or grow tired of working towards its fulfilment. All other longings lead to mental distortion, as they are born of *ajnana*, ignorance. Only this one desire is helpful to a sadhaka.

Swami Sivananda used to say, “The desire for liberation will destroy all worldly desires.” One maintains the state of desire in the mind while the spiritual desire to attain liberation develops. When the desire for enlightenment becomes stronger and all-permeating, the other desires are nullified and rent asunder. If there is only one desire, the desire for enlightenment, meditation and samadhi become easy. Then, after one has attained samadhi, even this desire is nullified, and one is able to live the life of a renunciate while actively carrying out duties on the worldly plane.

When a person aims for liberation, he forgets the external desires, so spiritual yearning is not desire. In the beginning, however, this desire can be created to help with the continuation of sadhana.

How can a person attain something he really aspires for?

Swami Satyananda: In order to attain anything in life, a person should have just one aim at all times; there should be no second aim. For example, if a person wants to earn money, he should think only of that without allowing any attachments to interfere. He should have no attachments to children, wife or anything. In order to attain an important goal, one needs to develop one-pointedness and detachment. Personal relationships and involvements should not be a diversion. Detachment does not mean not having relationships. One still lives with people and loves them, but remains detached by keeping the one desire in mind.

How should one renounce desires?

Swami Satyananda: Renunciation of desires leads to self-realization. The greater the degree of renunciation, the greater the abandonment of desires and longings, the greater will be the resulting sense of fullness. But this

abandonment must be sincere, as in the case of an *apta kama*, a realized sage, whose desires have been fulfilled, and not filled with concealed longing for the state of their fulfilment. The world does not know this technique and thus reacts powerfully to any instruction relating to vairagya, but it is a fact that the more one runs after one's shadow, the greater will be its forward movement. Yet once the shadow is kept behind, it begins to follow. If selfish attachments are given up, everything is gained.

However, most people who say that desires must be renounced do not know the truth about spiritual life. Sometimes people undergo an intellectual exercise of renouncing of desires. They begin to think, "I don't want this; I should not have that," but this is merely an intellectual process. Nothing can be done about attachment. That is where mistakes are often made. People try to overcome attachment. Most people who have become a little bit spiritual, a little bit wiser, or who claim to be wiser, start out by trying to resolve their attachments. It's a natural reaction of the human mind, but it is a mistake, as attachment is not something that can be destroyed. Attachment has its roots in craving, and that craving is essential nutrition for man's creation. If there were no craving, no one would have lived and no one would have been born.

When the inner awareness is heightened, in the course of time the unnecessary desires automatically fall away, just as in winter the leaves fall and the trees become bare. Once the karmas die, the desires, cravings, passions and attachments, which are the motivating forces for karma, gradually wither. The practice of abandonment of desires slowly fosters a desireless attitude, and when one becomes desireless as a matter of course, no attempt to give up desires is necessary.

Even as a serpent sheds its skin at the proper time, in the same way, a yogi gives up unnecessary desires without fighting with them. It is not known which desires are necessary and which are unnecessary, so one must let the unnecessary desires fall away of their own accord.

Most religious preachers and philosophers teach renunciation of desires and thereby a kind of suppression sets into the personality. Desire does not have to be renounced. Renunciation of desire is the royal road to the destruction of society and the nation. One should remember this always. Therefore, desires have to be redirected and re-channelled, and after some time they should be sublimated.

SUBLIMATING DESIRES

What happens to desires in the course of life?

Swami Satyananda: Desires cannot be kept in waiting and desires cannot be finished. The only way is to change the direction of the mind. This can be made clear with an example.

A small girl plays with her dolls and toys. If one doll breaks, her heart is broken and she cries. But the mother cannot understand it – after all, it’s just a doll! Of course, the child is unable to conceive that, as she has limited thinking. When the same child is twelve or thirteen, her interests are different. She is involved with school, sports and games, and she runs after boys and girls. The dolls and toys she used to play with are locked away in a storeroom. Some of them have been lost and others are broken, but she is not disturbed by this. How did she transcend her desires? It was a natural, automatic process. Her mind evolved from one stage to another, so her values changed.

When the same child is twenty-one, she is concerned with her job, her flat, her motor car or scooter, having a nice boyfriend, and so on. If she loses her boyfriend, her heart is broken. If she loses her money, she is distraught. If anything shatters her lifestyle, she’s finished. But she does not care what happens to her toys; they’re well and truly forgotten. Suddenly, one fine day, she comes into contact with a swami or a yoga teacher and begins to learn yoga. Now, her car, nightclub and good clothing don’t matter. Even the situations and standards of life do not mean much to her. She doesn’t

care who comes into her life and who goes. She becomes a *sakshi*, a witness or seer.

The same person who desired toys as a child, who was attached to her games and friends as a teenager and who was concerned with establishing a pleasant and comfortable lifestyle as a young woman, now cares for nothing. How did this happen? Were her desires finished? No. When the consciousness changes, the quality of desire also changes. Today she desires successful meditation and samadhi, which means that all of her desires have formed a new alignment. Desire is not a particular thing. It is a force, which picks up anything.

Desires can be channelled into one force, known as the desire for liberation. This desire for liberation or freedom is inherent in every human being. Every human being wants to be free. No one wants to remain a slave of petty desires. Since this desire for liberation is present in everybody, it is possible that the other types of desires can be channelled. If this can happen, much of the work is accomplished.

What does sublimation or channelling of desire mean?

Swami Satyananda: Ultimately, desires should be channelled in such a way that they lead to desirelessness. Most people believe that channelling or sublimation of desire means renunciation of the act itself, but this is not correct. A proper frame of mind is necessary in order to channel desires. The interpretation of sublimation is influenced by the guilt that people suffer. The sublimation of sex is a good example. Some people think that they should give it up: that is how the words sublimation and channelling are interpreted. Those who do this, however, may end up in mental hospitals, for what is natural must be expected and respected. Personal ideologies and personal philosophies cannot be imposed on the laws of nature. If someone is suffering from guilt in relation to sex, that is a great misfortune.

Sublimation and channelling are scientific, metaphysical, philosophical and psychological processes. From the word

sublime comes the word sublimation. In order to sublimate, there is no need to renounce anything. Just realize that it is sublime! What one has been thinking was a sin becomes sublime from today. Similarly, channelling presupposes a purpose, an objective. It does not mean blocking the flow. The purpose of sexual interaction is pleasure for some, progeny for others, and samadhi for the seeker. The objective determines the absolute interpretation of channelling. If sexual interaction has been used for pleasure or procreation so far, now one can channel it for samadhi.

Sublimation and channelling, therefore, do not require one to put a full stop to the fulfilment of desire. Desire is not bad, but the energy of nature working through the individual. A person who is not able to control his desires is not able to contain that energy. The same desire for the ordinary things of life will later become the desire for *moksha*, liberation. When desire is directed towards worldly things, it is called ordinary desire. When the same desire is directed towards spiritual experience, it is called *moksha*.

Didn't Mirabai have passion? Why did she look upon Sri Krishna as her husband, and not as her son, father or brother? She had passion, and therefore she chose the Lord as her husband and lover. The words that Mirabai used in her poetry are all charged with eroticism:

*What can I say? I have no words
To convey my longing;
Pray come, and quench
This fire that's searing my heart.*

*Lord, You know all;
Then why do you torment me thus?
Pray, have mercy,
Come and meet Mira
Who, for ever your slave,
In love surrenders at Your feet.*

The difference, however, is that her passion was directed towards God, so it elevated her to sublime heights. It was the same with Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In Christianity the idea of a conjugal relationship between man and God is present. Man is the bride and God is considered to be the bridegroom. Therefore, desire has to be redirected and re-channelled in order to achieve the highest goal in life.

How does yoga manage the four instincts?

Swami Niranjanananda: When swadhisthana chakra awakens, there is a much stronger manifestation of the samskaras which relate to the four main instincts of life: (i) sexual urge, (ii) fear, (iii) desire for food, and (iv) desire for sleep. These four instincts have their seats in mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata chakras respectively.

How can one control or eliminate those samskaras? First they are exploded or made more manifest by the different sadhanas of hatha, kriya and kundalini yoga. Second, their effects are channelled and the released energy is used positively. Here the sadhanas of karma yoga and bhakti yoga become essential. Third, the more meditative approach of laya yoga can be employed by undergoing a process of contemplation, reflection and reasoning.

What is the approach of laya yoga towards desires?

Swami Niranjanananda: Once mooladhara chakra is active, both positive and negative experiences will manifest. Negative experiences will manifest in the form of increased sensitivity and insecurity, increased intensity of the sexual urge and increased desire for some kind of satisfying relationship in which one feels secure. These experiences appear to be negative, but actually they are related to one's external life. How does one fulfil that craving which is experienced inside with the awakening of mooladhara? Often the only way is by running wild in external life.

When one begins to practise laya yoga, however, the complementary attributes or qualities for these states are

awakened. If insecurity is manifesting intensely, through the process of observation the complementary factor will be developed so that the vacuum is not felt. If there is an intense desire, through the process of observation another quality will be developed. How to direct the mind away from the trap of intense desire is taught through this meditative process.

How can vasanas be sublimated?

Swami Satyananda: There are three ways of sublimating vasanas. One way is through karma yoga, doing social service, like Mahatma Gandhi did. He sublimated or transformed his vasanas in such a way that they no longer remained personal. Serving others selflessly and doing good turns transforms desire into noble inclinations. The second way is to attain samadhi. Practise half an hour of meditation on *shoonya*, the void. In karma yoga, the vasanas become dissipated and weakened, but in samadhi they are burnt completely. There is a third way, which is difficult: leave everything to God and let Him do what He likes.

Desires can also be dedicated to a higher reality, such as guru or God. This may take various forms, such as, “Let me have more money, so that I can give something to my guru”, “Let me have more money, so that I can feed the hungry”, “Let me have more political power, so that I can help many people”, or “Let me have more strength, so that I can serve my wife, children and family.”

The transformation of desire is an important topic. Desires should be channelled and rationalized as far as possible. However, the desires related to the three basic human drives: sexual interaction, progeny and prosperity, have to be fulfilled.

How do sama and dama help eradicate vasanas?

Swami Sivananda: Through the practice of *sama*, equanimity, the aspirant destroys the vasanas one by one. He crushes them as soon as they try to raise their head on the surface of

the mind-lake. He must not allow them to sprout forth. This is called *vasana tyaga*, renunciation of subtle desires. A man of equanimity is neither exulted when he obtains a desired object, *ishtha*, nor depressed when he gets an undesired object, *anishtha*. He keeps a balanced mind always and has no enemies. Sama is one of the four sentinels of moksha. If one has sama, one will be in the company of the three friends: *santosha*, contentment, *vichara*, enquiry into the nature of truth, and *satsang*, association with the wise and saintly.

Sama alone, however, is not sufficient. The senses must be rendered blunt by *dama*, self-control. A vasana for sweets, for instance, should be destroyed by sama through vasana tyaga, crushing the vasanas within as soon as a desire arises. The desire which arises through the sight of sweets should be destroyed by withdrawing the eyes when moving about the market and by giving up sugar. Dama supplements sama in control of the mind. It is an auxiliary for the complete eradication of vasanas.

If a person gives up an old habit of drinking tea, he has controlled to a certain extent the sense of taste. He has destroyed one vasana. It will give some peace, as the craving for tea has gone and he is freed from efforts and thoughts about getting tea, sugar and milk. Thinking is pain, seeing is pain, hearing is pain for a philosopher and a sadhaka. It is all pleasure for a worldly person. The energy that made one run after tea is now transmuted into will. Peace and willpower are gained by giving up one thing. If fifteen things are given up, the peace of mind will be still greater and the will more powerful. This is the fruit of tyaga. One is not a loser, but gains more knowledge, bliss and power. It is giving up something in favour of something higher. If one vasana is controlled, it will be easy to control other vasanas, too, as strength and power are gained.

How can the energy of desire be sublimated?

Swami Satyananda: Every desire and thought which comes into the mind is a manifestation of energy; it is not a

psychological substance. Desire, thought, passion, love and hatred are not psychological; basically they are energy.

The mental energy is called *ida*, and the pranic energy is known as *pingala*. These two energies flow in this physical body as the electrical energy flows in a cable. *Ida* flows through the left side and *pingala* flows from the right, each crossing all the chakras up to *ajna* chakra. These are the two different forms of energy which maintain every rhythm in the physical body.

If the desire is abnormal, it means the *ida* complex is out of harmony. If hunger, passion, anger or aggression is excessive, the pranic force is out of harmony. When *ida nadi* is predominant and *pingala nadi* is subservient, the desires are insatiable. When *pingala nadi* is predominant and *ida nadi* is subservient, all the physical actions are agitated. Desire is a mental disease, but its root has to be discovered in the physical body.

In order to resolve the unnecessary desires, something has to be done. If nothing is done, the physical and mental diseases will definitely creep into the body. Sublimation is a way to handle desire.

In order to sublimate this energy, certain channels have to be created. In India, there are ashrams. The word *ashram* means 'a place of hard work'. This hard work and hard life in the ashram should be experienced by everybody: the residents, the visitors and even the builders of the ashram, as leading a hard life is the first act of sublimation or channelling. A way has to be paved, a trend has to be set and a channel created to direct the bad or negative thoughts into good or positive ones. The shastras say to put the inauspicious thoughts on an auspicious track. Rishi Vasishtha said to Sri Rama in *Yoga Vasishtha* (2:9:30):

*Shubhaashubhaabhyam maargaabhyam vahantee vaasanaasrit;
Paurushena prayatnena yojaneeyaa shubhe pathi.*

The current of desires flows in between the two channels of good and evil; by the exertion of activity one must turn it to the right course.

Auspicious or good thoughts are generated by good actions and good turns done to others. It is said again and again, be involved in good work. One should start doing good to others and to oneself. Singing God's name, visiting pilgrimage places and temples are good acts. Serving the country or community, building hospitals, schools and orphanages are good actions. But the best action is to help women, as the female principle is the basis of creation.

All the heroes, saints and godly men were born of women. Rama, Sri Krishna and Hanuman were all born of mothers. Mothers are the manufacturing plants for babies. Therefore, if women are served well, the babies of the coming generation will be of a high quality. The baby daughters born of good mothers will not be mentally deficient and dull, but intelligent and capable. In the present times, the best action is service to the mother. The mother should be served, one's own as well as others.

Small girls are all future mothers. By serving them, the turmoil of desires and passions within subsides and serenity prevails. The root cause of desire and passion is a woman; therefore, begin to serve the root cause and the result will be amazing. Passions and cravings will be subdued and toned down.

What is the role of sannyasa ashrama in the sublimation of desires?

Swami Satyananda: Sannyasa is necessary, as it provides an opportunity to give a new direction to one's desires. It is a turning point. I do not claim to be free of desire. If I were to make such a false claim, it would be dishonest. But I have given a new turn to my desires. During youth and middle age, one leads a life of *bhoga*, pleasure. But when old age comes, desires still play havoc, they never wane. Therefore, the shastras suggest turning towards sannyasa life at that time. Shave the head and enter an ashram, or become involved in a life of service, for example, by opening a hospital. Once the mind is engrossed in the work of the hospital, the desires will change their direction and form.

How does sannyasa redirect desire?

Swami Satyananda: Although sannyasa is the way of renunciation, one initially decides to tread this path due to desire. Every person's real desire is for the higher life, and in sannyasa, the gratification of all lesser desires is re-channelled towards this single major aim. One can have ambition, social ideals, sensual expression, or any form of desire, large or small, and still be a renunciate.

How are these transcended in spiritual life? While everyone has desire, the spiritual aspirant uses and directs it to strengthen and stabilize the highest states of awareness. The sannyasin sees, feels and experiences everything before him, but he totally renounces the feeling that is experienced when something is taken away. He renounces not the object, but the feeling. The object will always be there, but the attachment to the object, the craving for the experience of the object, must be eliminated.

The energy that is directed towards any desire is so powerful and has so much force behind it that it has to be expressed in some way in order to avoid suppression and disease. Most people express it externally on the physical plane in a way that is never full or complete. Thus it leaves buds that flower and produce the fruits of dissatisfaction, discontent, restlessness, frustration and emptiness. The sannyasin, however, learns to link and direct this dissipated energy towards a higher and greater fulfilment. Through selfless service and total dedication the desires become unified into a single desire. As energy and concentration increase, the mind becomes extremely powerful, like a laser beam, able to pierce the very core of existence.

There are other methods as well as sublimation for dealing with desires. One method is disassociation. Get out of that environment and go away somewhere. Leave that work and do some other work. Leave this kind of food and have another kind of diet. Leave this group of people and go to another group. This is called disassociation.

How does disassociation work?

Swami Sivananda: There is no desire for an object until one knows what it is like. It is only after one has seen it or heard of it or touched it that one gets a longing for it. Therefore, the best principle is not to take, touch or see anything that is likely to taint the imagination. One will have to turn aside the attention resolutely and particularly the imagination from the subject. In the course of time, all objectionable desires will die out.

A plant is starved by depriving it of water. Similarly, obnoxious desires may be starved by not allowing the mind to dwell on them. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:54:16):

*Sankalpo yena hantavyastena bhaavaviparyayaat;
Apyardhena nimeshena leelayaiva nihanyate.*

He who wants to destroy his desire can do it in a trice, by forgetting the thought of his desired object.

LIVING WITHOUT DESIRES

Does a time come when one decides to drop desires?

Swami Satyananda: Desires are never-ending. An inspector wants to be a director, a lawyer wants to go to the high court, a high court lawyer wants to become a judge, a session judge wants to become a high court judge and a high court judge wants to become a supreme court judge. There is no end to desires. When one desire is fulfilled, a person goes after another.

Desires cannot be satisfied and fulfilled. There is a moment when this process has to come to an end. A person can go on desiring for ten, twenty, thirty and forty years, always thinking, "Once my desires are satiated, I won't desire anymore." But the wise say this never happens, as desires can never be satiated. Therefore, at a particular point in life, those who have greater common sense, understanding, and wisdom decide, "No more desires now." They close that chapter and become desireless. It's hard to understand. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (6(2):160:22):

*Yaani sankalpajaalaani pratishthaamaagataanyalam;
Tyaktaikadrishyajaalasthadehaanaam dridhachetasaam.*

The web of desires that I have been fondly weaving so long proved at last to be fragile and frail. Hence people of firm minds learn betimes to abandon their desires for the whole range of visible objects.

Desires are like the demoness, Surasa. When Sita was abducted by Ravana, Rama went in search of her. After some time he found a powerful person to help him, Hanuman, the monkey god. It was discovered that Sita was in Lanka. Hanuman said that he would find her himself. He went to the seashore and from there he jumped across the sea and reached Lanka. He came across the demoness Surasa, who said, "I want to eat you." She made her mouth big enough to swallow him, so he also enlarged his body and become double in size. She went on increasing the dimension of her lips, and he also started increasing the dimensions of his body and became very big. Then Hanuman suddenly decreased the dimensions of his body. He became as small as a mosquito, went into her mouth and came out of her ear.

Premature desires are like this. A person goes on fulfilling his desires, and suddenly he stops all desires – that is, he 'comes out of the ear'. He becomes desireless. When this happens, suddenly all the jumping and acrobatic feats of the mind stop. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (1:3:9):

*Ksheenaayaam vaasanaayaam tu cheto galati satvaram;
Ksheenaayaam sheetasantatyam brahmanhimakano yathaa.*

The absence of desires leads to the extinction of mental actions, in the same manner as the absence of cold is conducive to the dissolution of small particles of ice.

Desire is the only propelling force that makes one think and act, that makes one work hard, that makes one practise yoga. Everything is done because of desire, whether the desire is materialistic or spiritual. Desire is desire, regardless of

whether if it is for the ordinary, transitory, perishable and fleeting objects of life or for nirvana, samadhi or kaivalya. They are all desires. It doesn't matter which chain binds the hand, a golden chain or an ordinary chain. A chain is a chain. Sage Vasishtha said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:57:19):

*Baddho hi vaasanaabaddho mokshah syaadvaasanaakshayah;
Vaasanaastvam parityajya mokshaarthitvamapi tyaja.*

The man bound to his desires is a bondsman, and the person freed from them is set free from his slavery.

This state of desirelessness is difficult to attain, but there is a time in life when some people must practise it. One has to be desireless, for one gets what one is destined to get, not what one desires.

If this world were to follow the pattern of one's desires, there would be no contentment. For people who are full of desires, this life becomes an abode of discontent. For those full of longings, this life is an abyss of despair. For devotees of God, this life is the road leading to God. For the wise, this life is a bundle of changing values. For those who are detached, this life is as dust. For those who have no control, this life is a consuming fire. For the coward, this life is a bundle of sins. For the yogi, this life is a means of purifying the mind.

Is it possible to experience enjoyment without being subject to desire?

Swami Sivananda: Suppose a man was a terrible smoker for fifteen years. Then he gave up smoking for five years and with it the craving for smoking also died. In the sixth year one of his friends offers him a cigar, but he has no craving for smoking anymore. If he takes it and enjoys it just to please his friend, it will be *shuddha bhoga*, or pure enjoyment, as he has enjoyed it without craving or desire. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:20):

*Na prahrishyetpriyam praapya nodvijetpraapya chaapriyam;
Sthirabuddhirasammoodho brahmaavid brahmani sthitah.*

Resting in Brahman, with steady intellect and undeluded, the knower of Brahman neither rejoices on obtaining what is pleasant nor grieves on obtaining what is unpleasant.

The same way of experiencing can be applied to love and marriage. One can observe brahmacharya, where there is enjoyment without desire, action without fruits. These terms appear opposed to each other. A person with a gross *buddhi*, intellect, can hardly understand this idea. A subtle, pure intellect is needed. Ishwara enjoys shuddha bhoga.

Which desires need to be renounced?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:49) that one who is in control of the self and devoid of desire is a true renunciate, and a true renunciate attains enlightenment:

*Asaktabuddhih sarvatra jitaatmaa vigatasprihah;
Naishkarmyasiddhim paramaam sannyaasenaadhigachchhati.*

He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self, from whom desire has fled, by renunciation he attains the supreme state of freedom from action.

The first point of the statement is being in control of the self and the second point is being devoid of desire. Both points are abstract terms, dealing with the last aspect of karma, the seed of desire.

When one begins the spiritual journey, the motivating factor is a desire. “I wish to . . .” is the form of one’s desire. It is not elimination or renunciation of this desire, but the renunciation of other limiting desires that is necessary. Sage Vasishtha said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:57:20–21):

*Taamaseevaasanaah poorvam tyaktvaa vishayavaasitaah;
Maitryaadibhaavanaanaamneem grihaanaamalavaasanaam.*

*Taamapyantah parityajya taamirvyaharannapi;
Antahshaantasamasteho bhava chinmaatravaasanaah.*

Forsake first your foul, tamasic desires. Then be freed from your desire of worldly possessions. Foster your better wishes next, and finally, be inclined towards pure and holy teachings. After having conducted yourself with pure desires, get rid of these at the end. Then, freed from all desires, be inclined towards and united with your intellect, knowing all and longing for nothing. (20–21)

One must know which are the limiting desires that hold one back and the propelling desires that push one forward. This can be understood by combining karma yoga with raja yoga and following the process of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Renunciation is an attribute of karma yoga.

What does it mean to renounce desires?

Swami Niranjanananda: In material life, a person is in a state of technological and material hypnosis. In this state he increases desires instead of reducing them. As the desires increase more and more, the consciousness becomes more gross and material and constantly craves pleasure. This is how the rat race begins. When a person begins to practise yoga and analyze his personality, he can overcome the conditionings that are detrimental to the growth and unfoldment of human nature. When one overcomes the conditionings which limit the inherent creativity and expression of wisdom, many unnecessary desires and attachments are simply left behind. This is the concept of renunciation.

Generally, people think that renunciation means leaving many things behind that are dear to them. In fact, renunciation is not something that is left behind but something which is attained. If someone has to go up some

stairs, they place their foot on the first step, and only when that foot is firmly placed on the step will the other foot leave the ground and go to the next step. When the other foot is placed firmly, the first one will leave that step and reach up to the next step. Each step must be attained before the previous one is left. Attainment always comes before renunciation.

How does yoga help transcend desires?

Swami Niranjanananda: Desire can never be controlled. There are various kinds of desire which manifest according to the strengths and weaknesses of each individual. There are physical desires, social desires and mental desires which have to be fulfilled in order to induce a sense of security. There are emotional desires that need to be fulfilled. There are psychic desires in the dimension of the chakras and kundalini, and there are spiritual desires.

Desires represent an urge to attain something and are generally related to a life of sensory and sensual pleasure. Generally they represent the fulfilment of the need for security. It is difficult to transcend them through the practices of yoga. Even in the last stage of samadhi desire still exists. Even God has desire! If He could not transcend it, how can man? God had the desire to create. The whole world is His creation!

In yoga it is said that once one is on the path of yoga or realization, one has to leave desire, the wish to attain something, aside, whether it is physical, social, external, internal or spiritual, and live in the present without having any expectation. To become desireless is difficult but it is possible to live in the present without any expectation. This will provide an understanding of how desires shape and guide life and destiny.

Finally, it is through the process of sadhana that one can reach a shunya state beyond desire. Desires are passing scenes on the road to moksha. One cannot remove or destroy them but they can be left behind. Once one reaches

the destination, they are not even remembered. Only memories remain in the form of photographs one has taken along the way.

How does fulfilling desires enable one to turn away from them?

Swami Sivananda: A person tries to find happiness in sensual objects. Too much sensual indulgence wears out the senses and brings disgust and disease of all kinds. The more sexual pleasures one enjoys, the greater the passion becomes. One learns bitter lessons. One learns that happiness does not lie in satisfying the desire of the body and the senses. At last one seeks to find happiness in his own atman within.

Why is contentment important?

Swami Sivananda: A contented mind is a continual feast. Contentment is one of the greatest of virtues. For one who is content, all the wealth of the world will have no attraction. A contented mind is ever peaceful and joyous. To such a mind, the enjoyment of sensual pleasures is like poison. The mind of a truly contented man is always turned towards God and higher spiritual pursuits. Eradication of desires leads to the sublime state of supreme peace.

How can one be without desires?

Swami Satyananda: There is a state called desirelessness, but it is not attained through a negative method, such as trying to be detached, renouncing, hating, avoiding or bypassing the objects of life. Some sort of wisdom or cosmic link has to be discovered and realized. Swami Vivekananda said, “The *jīvanmukta*, the liberated sage, has conquered all desire by rising to the knowledge that he is the One, and there is nothing left to wish for.” It is also said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:55, 6:18):

*Prajahaati yadaa kaamaansarvaanpaartha manogataan;
Aatmanyevaatmanaa tushtah sthitaprajnastadochyate.*

When a man completely casts off, O Arjuna, all the desires of the mind and is satisfied in the self by the self, then he is said to be one of steady wisdom. (2:55)

*Yadaa viniyatam chittamaatmanyevaavatishthate;
Nihsprihah sarvakaamebhyo yukta ityuchyate tadaa.*

When the perfectly controlled mind rests in the self only, free from longing for the objects of desire, then it is said, “He is united.” (6:18)

How is this realization possible? Either one is born like that, or one becomes aware that nothing has to be done, nothing has to be gained and nothing has to be accomplished; there is a great nature which is already functioning within, and a great power which is taking care of everything. Only then can one experience fullness and totality. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:17–18):

*Yastvaatmaratireva syaadaatmatriptashcha maanavah;
Aatmanyeva cha santushtastasya kaaryam na vidyate.*

*Naiiva tasya kritenaartha naakriteneha kashchana;
Na chaasya sarvabhooteshu kashchidarthavyapaashrayah.*

But for that man who rejoices only in the self, who is satisfied with the self, who is content in the self alone, truly there is nothing to do. (17)

For him there is no interest whatsoever in what is done or what is not done; nor does he depend on any being for any object. (18)

One must feel that, ‘I am a medium. I have no desire of my own, no plans of my own.’ A medium is like a flute upon which any tune can be played. The flute has nothing to do with the choice of tune that is played on it. In the same way, I am a medium of somebody. He is working through me, thinking through me and speaking through me. I don’t have to do anything. I realized that I was a medium in 1964.

Before that I knew it intellectually and I thought about it, but in 1964 I experienced it. There is a difference between knowledge and experience. That experience confirmed that I am not the doer; I am the medium.

Desires disappear as soon as discriminative knowledge arises. All actions remain suspended and the mind becomes pure. The pure intelligence is awakened and the pure awareness manifests. In the words of Sri Ramana Maharshi, “The state free from vasanas is the primal and eternal state of purity.”

Are there different types of desirelessness?

Swami Satyananda: Desirelessness is of many types. Ramana Maharshi lived without desire. I saw him over a period of at least ten or fifteen years. I used to walk around Arunachala, and I would go to him. He was not concerned about himself, about whether he ate or not. He was desireless. He had not suppressed his desires; he was above desires.

When I was in the ashram of Swami Sivananda, I used to practise ashtanga yoga. I tried *aparigraha*, non-possession. I would never keep anything in my room, for the rule is that a sannyasin should keep the minimum. However, Swamiji said, “You selfish fellow, you live only for your own sake, for your own happiness and satisfaction. You can keep the minimal requirements for yourself, but have some things with you for others. Keep twenty tumblers, three beds, twenty-five mattresses, fifteen dhotis and some money. Distribute these things to anybody who comes to you; help everyone.” Swamiji would often tell me, “Keep tea, coffee, blankets and many things. Give them to anyone who needs them.” I liked this suggestion; this is another form of desirelessness.

One form of desirelessness is not to desire at all, neither for oneself nor for others. The other form is not to desire anything for oneself but desire for the sake of others, for that is not desire. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (3:22:5):

*Yeyam tu jeevanmuktaanaam vasanaa saa na vaasanaa;
Shuddhasatvaabhidhaanam tatsattaa saamaanyamuchyate.*

The desire of jivanmuktas is not properly any desire at all, since it is the pure desire relating to universal wealth and happiness.

Compassion and mercy for other people is not desire. Desire is guided by selfishness. If there is no selfishness, if there is selflessness, that is not desire. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:19):

*Yasya sarve samaarambhaah kaamasankalpavarjitaah;
Jnaanaagnidagdhakarmaanam tamaahuh panditam budhaah.*

He whose undertakings are all devoid of desires and selfish purposes, and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, him the wise call a sage.



3

Suffering

BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Why is suffering something positive?

Swami Sivananda: Misery is a blessing in disguise. Misery is the eye-opener in this world. Every suffering, every pain, every adversity moulds one little by little into the image of God. In suffering there is more purification, and in enjoyment there is more bondage. Were it not for the presence of pain and misery, no one would attempt to attain salvation. Pain is the best thing in the world. Never forget this.

Why is there so much pain and misery in the world?

Swami Sivananda: Virtuous people treat suffering as a blessing, as it develops the powers of endurance and mercy, and makes them remember God always. They welcome suffering and do not want worldly pleasure and prosperity. They have a changed vision and always keep a balanced mind in pleasure and pain. They rejoice in suffering. Kunti Devi said: "O Sri Krishna! Let me always remember You. Give me pain always. I may forget You if I get pleasure." Bhaktas rejoice in suffering. They welcome pain always. Stoics do the same. A worldly mind cannot understand this state.

Is suffering inevitable?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone who is born in a body has to undergo the ills of the body, but the difference is that the wise undergo suffering calmly and the idiots wail. No human relationship is complete, whether between spouses, parents and children or other family members. Nowhere is there absolute completeness. There is no perfection in this world of plenty and affluence. Happiness is not complete, nor are sorrow and misery. When this is the state of affairs, the outlook and way of thinking must be changed.

Is it possible to fulfil all of one's desires and always experience happiness?

Swami Satyananda: There are three types of karmas, three types of fruit and three types of enjoyers of the senses. The three types of karmas are: ordinary action, great action and evil action. Out of all the actions performed in the world there are three types of result or fruit. Any action that is performed or any relationship that is started can produce three types of result: desired, undesired and mixed. Either the result is positive, negative or a mixture of both. The result that is wanted is a positive result, the result that is not wanted is a negative result, and that which is both wanted and not wanted is a mixed result.

When everything is received according to the desires of the mind, this is called the desired fruit of action. The second fruit of action is undesired: something was desired, but something else was received. The third fruit of action is mixed or blended. For example, the father had hoped that his son would go to London to qualify as a lawyer, but instead he studied law in India. This is a mixed fruit of action. The desire was partly fulfilled and partly unfulfilled. In this way, there are three types of fruits of action.

Similarly, there are three types of enjoyers of the senses. The first group consists of the happy people, who are enjoying the desired fruits of their actions. These people are happy, as their desires are fulfilled. The second group

consists of the unhappy people who are experiencing the undesired fruits of action. The unwanted keeps happening to them, so they always have to suffer. The third group consists of those people who never get exactly what their mind desires. They are neither happy nor unhappy. For example, a man's wife never listens to him, but nevertheless his son is very capable. This person experiences mixed fruit of action. There are other examples: a man is of good character, capable and respected, but he has health problems. A man is a genius, who does great work, but his character is not good. These are people who experience mixed fruit of action. In this way it can be seen that there are three types of enjoyers of the senses in the world.

In this human existence, however, there is no purely positive or purely negative result; it is a mixture of both. Therefore, in life one sometimes obtains positive results and sometimes negative results. It is just not possible that all of one's desires are fulfilled. In the same way it is not possible that all one's wishes remain unfulfilled.

My personal opinion is that nobody in the world has ever experienced only happiness, nor has anyone experienced only unhappiness. Those who are intelligent will notice that everyone who lives in the world experiences both happiness and unhappiness by turn. In a person's life there are both unhappiness and happiness. A negative result depresses and a positive result gives elation. Therefore, a person is always experiencing emotional ups and downs, which make him more ambitious and more insecure. When happiness comes, there is unhappiness, due to the knowledge that the happiness may not last. This completely disturbs the balance of life.

Is the human mind affected more by happiness or unhappiness?

Swami Satyananda: Unhappiness leaves a deep impression on the mind and happiness is suppressed. If there is a wedding in the house and somebody dies in that house on

the same day, would a wedding band be playing or would there be mourning in that house? Obviously, there would be mourning; this is the custom.

No one would ask, why does the band not play, why is there only mourning? The mind is more affected by unhappiness than by happiness. When happiness and unhappiness come at the same time, unhappiness alone takes charge and happiness ends. Happiness is mild and unhappiness is strong. Even a little unhappiness will ruin all the happiness, but the greatest happiness cannot suppress a little unhappiness. This is the way of the world. Unhappiness creates a greater impression on the mind than happiness; that is the rule.

A person is always averse to death, disease, poverty, insult, discomfort and hostility, and he desires prosperity, sympathy, comfort and friends. This is the peculiarity of human nature, and the absence of the desired thing or the presence of the undesired thing has a strong effect on the mind.

It is said that all of life is suffering, that every experience in life involves suffering. How can this be understood?

Swami Satyananda: In Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:15) it is said:

*Parinaamataapasamskaaraduhkhaingunavrittivirodhaachcha
dukkhameva sarvam vivekinah.*

In the case of one who has discrimination, viveka, all is painful because of pains due to change, acute suffering, samskaras, and also due to gunas and vrittis in opposition.

Everything in life is painful, even the so-called happiness of success, position, power and so on, for one who has developed discrimination, who has analyzed life thoroughly, who is able to know truth and untruth, and who is able to know the difference between light and darkness. The logic behind this is that every action is always accompanied by

three things: change, misery and impression. For example, a man may acquire much property. He may look happy, but there will be acute anxiety in the deeper layers of his mind. In this way, anything enjoyable is painful in the ultimate analysis. This psychic pain is at the root of everything.

The first pain is change or *parinama*, milk becomes curd, life changes into death. The next pain is acute anxiety, *tapa*. Any achievement, success, love affair and so on gives rise to anxiety at some time. Unfair dealings and illegal business cause anxiety. The third factor is *samskara*, or habit. A person is so used to happiness and luxury that he is afraid of losing it. He becomes a slave to circumstances and habits, and that gives rise to pain. Property and wealth become the cause of anxiety, as one is afraid of losing them. This is usually not understood by psychiatrists, and they go on enquiring about petty matters, which may not be the real cause of anxiety. One should go to the root of anxiety, and only then can it be removed. It should be understood that everything is painful at the bottom, if not at the surface.

There is always a conflict between the three gunas and the mental tendencies, or *vrittis*. For example, I want to relax; I do not want to work. This is the demand of *tamo* guna, but there is also the thought, "I have to feed my wife and children, so I have to work." This gives rise to conflicts. The gunas compel one course of action, when there is a desire or need to do something altogether different. Thus there is conflict between the gunas and the mental tendencies; they never agree. So long as there is this disagreement, there will be pain. This is especially true of intelligent, sensitive people. There is always a conflict at the conscious or subconscious level.

Everything in life is painful in essence. Someone may not like his job, but he has to do it. A desired change may not come, which gives rise to pain. Even great and learned people have mental conflicts. They may read and learn the scriptures, philosophy, religion or science, but their mind is not free from conflict. Even a spiritual aspirant experiences conflict. His mind may wish to have a deeper or different

sadhana because he feels dull. He may want to follow another master or tradition, so there is conflict. Conflict in the personality proves that everything that one experiences in the world is full of pain.

Why doesn't God fulfil all desires and make everyone happy?

Swami Satyananda: God has given illness, but He has also given intelligence. If a patient asks the doctor for the medicine of his choice, will the doctor give it to him? If he asks for poison, the doctor will not prescribe it. He will give the medicine that is necessary. If a child wants to put his hand in the fire, the mother will never allow it. Similarly, God fulfils some of man's desires and not others.

Every person definitely has some strength within. One person becomes a learned scholar and another an artist or a gifted singer. Why should one be unhappy, when actually some desires have been fulfilled? If God has given a house, children and prosperity, why should a person be unhappy when his father dies? God has given everything else, hasn't He? God has given a powerful mind, so why be unhappy?

Unhappiness comes from a person's mistakes. God does not give anyone unhappiness or happiness. One should not accuse destiny and God when the body is ailing, when one is deserted by one's lover, or when the situations in life are hard. One should not say, "God cursed me". This is an insult, just as it is an insult to say that a mother punishes her child. No. A mother loves her child; she cannot punish him, and God cannot punish you.

What are the forms of suffering?

Swami Niranjanananda: A person suffers when he is unable to eliminate negative mental stuff. This suffering can take the form of physical disease, mental imbalance, emotional or spiritual crisis due to suppression and misunderstandings in life. Suffering has been divided into three categories: *adhidaivika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhyatmika*. *Adhidaivika*

suffering is due to natural causes, such as earthquake, flood, famine, fire and other catastrophes. It stems from cosmic or divine influences and is beyond the control of a human being.

Adhibhautika suffering stems from material causes and is inherent in physical existence. It is generated by wrong lifestyle and changing situations in the world, which one is unable to adjust or cope with. It includes most of the diseases and illnesses that are encountered today. Another form of this suffering is the fear or threat of other people or beings. Supposing a tiger were to suddenly appear, everyone would run away and stay away until the threat had passed.

Adhyatmika suffering comes from within and is due to spiritual, personal or inner causes, such as insecurity, fear, anxiety and unhappiness. This form of suffering is related to the body, mind, emotions and society.

Why does God allow wicked persons to flourish, while good people suffer?

Swami Sivananda: This is an age-old question, as old as the world itself. In the *Mahabharata*, the great Bhishma shed tears while lying on his death-bed. When asked why, he replied that the Pandavas were great devotees of the Lord and always abided by the laws of dharma. Above all, the Lord was constantly with them in the form of Sri Krishna, and yet they suffered so much. Some wicked people do flourish in this world of hypocrisy, but it does not mean that they are free from suffering. The good souls do not suffer as much as the 'flourishing' wicked ones, for peace is in their hearts. Abiding by the ideals that they hold sacred is in itself a great cause of happiness.

The welfare and misery of people can be explained only by the law of karma. Good persons suffer because of the mistakes they committed in past incarnations. Wicked persons, who seem to be well off, are reaping the results of their past good actions, but later they will have to pay the price of their present bad ones. The law of karma controls all

the good and bad conditions of humanity. God is above this. If God were responsible for the individual state of affairs, the enjoyment or suffering of every person, God would cease to be God. A partial God, dishing out favours to some and withholding them from the others, would be no God at all.

The law of karma is inexorable. Everyone reaps the fruits of their previous births. A good person may suffer a lot because he is forging ahead in the spiritual march. Many of his evil karmas have to be worked out or purged quickly in order to hasten his salvation in this current life. But God gives him extraordinary endurance through His grace. An aspirant or a good man may face many difficulties and sufferings, but he rejoices, even in suffering and destitution, due to the descent of the Lord's grace. He voluntarily welcomes these sufferings. The single best thing in this world is pain or suffering, as it opens the eyes to God.

The devotee is certainly not left to the mercy of his *poorva karma*, foremost karma; he is beautifully clothed in the protective shield of His grace. Just as in the worst winter or most violent storm, those in warm clothing in their house remain unaffected, in the same way, the devotee does not feel suffering at all and is ever happy and blissful in His remembrance, although to the onlookers he appears to be poor, sick or suffering.

CAUSES OF SUFFERING

How can suffering be defined?

Swami Niranjanananda: The original philosophy of yoga as expounded by the ascetic Shiva to his disciple and consort Parvati came about when she asked, "How can one overcome pain and suffering in life?" To this Shiva answered, "Suffering is not necessarily pain, but a change in the static existence of life." This can be observed in one's life. When one is not able to handle change, it is experienced as suffering, but if one is comfortable with change, it does not become suffering.

It is disturbance in the natural ease and comfort of life which changes the mental behaviour and emotional makeup. It changes everything. If the weather is cold, the body begins to shiver. The natural ease of the body is disturbed and that is felt as suffering. If sufficient warm clothes are worn, the cold still exists, but one does not perceive it as suffering.

Anyone who is born into this life and becomes a life member of this planet is subject to suffering or change. That, however, is not the problem. The problem is the inability to adjust to change, due to the association with the senses and sense objects.

How do karmas and kleshas interact in the cycle of birth and death?

Swami Satyananda: The afflictions, *kleshas*, exist in the past, present and future births. It is said in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:12):

Kleshamoolah karmaashayo drishtaadrishhtajanmavedaneeyah.

This storehouse of karmas, *karmashaya*, which is the root cause of afflictions, is experienced in the present and future births.

This means that one's karmas are caused by these afflictions. While the afflictions remain, they lead to the experience of present and future births, for every individual has to undergo the effects of past karmas. If the karmas are to be annihilated, it is essential to go back to their source, namely, the fivefold afflictions: *avidya*, ignorance, *asmita*, I-ness, *raga*, attraction, *dvesha*, repulsion, and *abhivivesha*, fear of death and the instinct of self-preservation. It is a two-way process; the karmas cause kleshas and the kleshas give rise to fresh karmas. With the fresh karmas one accumulates fresh *samskaras*, and those *samskaras* again strengthen the cause of afflictions. Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:13) also state:

Sati moole tadvipaako jaatyayurbhogaah.

So long as the root of karmashaya, the storehouse of karmas, is there, it ripens and gives birth, class, span of life and experience.

As long as the root is there, the tree will flourish. If the tree is not disturbed, its fruit must also ripen. This life is the tree and the afflictions are its roots. If the root is cut, that is, if the fivefold afflictions are removed, naturally this great tree of life would become lifeless and could produce no further fruit. The span of life is nothing but different experiences. These experiences are of three kinds: enjoyable, painful and mixed. The span of life may be long or short. The birth one takes in a particular country, society or family is called *jati*. All these three things are the fruits of the karmashaya. As every fruit is connected with the tree, and every tree with the roots, so the situation of one's birth is connected with one's life, which is the result of the past karmas.

Similarly, the karmashaya is dependent on the roots of afflictions. If the fruiting is to be stopped, the tree must be destroyed, and for this, the roots, or the afflictions, must be removed. So long as there are afflictions, there will be karmashaya, which will certainly produce its effects. The causal body, *karana sharira*, is the sleeping place of karmas and is rooted in the afflictions. One cannot merely cut down the trunk of a tree to destroy it. The roots must also be destroyed. Therefore, the *karana sharira* and especially its roots, the afflictions, should be removed.

What is the basis of suffering, according to the Yoga Sutras?

Swami Satyananda: People think that their miseries are the only miseries, due to egoistic tendencies. Philosophers and psychologists have tried to discover the basis of pain and they have found that pain is not rooted in the present, but in the distant past. In Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:3) it is said:

Avidyaasmitaaraagadvashaabhiniवेशाह kleshaah.

Ignorance, I-feeling, liking, disliking and fear of death are the pains or afflictions.

According to yoga, suffering is a *klesha*, or affliction, a kind of agony which is inside one's being. Everyone feels subconscious pain, but the superficial daily activities do not allow one to be aware of it; otherwise one would see pain in all its vividness. The outer person is different from the inner person. One school of psychology, known as 'depth psychology', says that there are various dimensions of human existence, and that the inner self behaves in a different way to the outer. While one speaks truth outwardly, one lies inwardly. The behaviour of the outer person and the inner person are opposite.

The student of yoga should know about depth psychology, which says that real happiness is not skin deep. The inner life may be different to the outer life, so one cannot judge a person on the basis of his outer life. A rich and educated person, who appears happy from the outside, may be extremely unhappy within, whereas a poor and uneducated man may have happiness and bliss inside.

The kleshas must be viewed from the point of view of depth psychology. Usually people are never free from the kleshas. A great yogi can overcome them, but they are found in all other persons. So long as the kleshas are there, it is impossible to realize the higher self.

What is the fundamental cause of suffering?

Swami Satyananda: Every karma is capable of producing an effect; this is a universal law. Karmas accumulate due to past and present actions. The fruits of bad karmas cannot be counteracted through good karmas and vice versa. Both the good and bad effects must be undergone, but there is a method by which the stock of ancient karmas in the karmashaya, storehouse of karmas, can be exhausted. There is one cause of karma that must be avoided in order to prevent suffering, which is the effect of karma. That cause

is the union or association of the seer and the seen. In Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:17) it is said:

Drashtridrishyayoh samyogo heyahetuh.

The union between the seer and the seen is the cause of *heya*, that which is to be avoided.

There is an identification or association of the seer and the seen. Suffering starts due to this association. A person suffers due to his relationships and identification with situations. Nothing in this world is a cause of suffering. Everyone is responsible for their sorrows. It is just the identification with external events which brings grief.

In order to avoid the cause of suffering, one must understand the process of union between the seer, *drashta*, and the seen, *drishya*, between the subject and the object. Everyone is familiar with this type of wrong identification. When one watches a film or stage play, one tends to identify with the character that is being portrayed and one experiences corresponding emotions of sorrow, joy, fear, like, dislike and so on. Although the actors are only playing a role, one tends to identify with them and forget that one is merely a spectator. In the same way, purusha is only a witnessing consciousness, but having forgotten his true nature, he identifies with chitta and its patterns or modifications to such an extent that it is difficult to extricate himself.

The cause for the union of purusha and prakriti is ignorance. It is said in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:24 and 2:5):

Tasya heturavidyaa.

*Anityaashuchiduhkhaanaatmasu nityashuchisukhaatma-
khyaatiravidyaa.*

The cause of union is avidya. (24)

Avidya is mistaking the non-eternal, impure, negative and noumenon for the eternal, pure, good and atman respectively. (5)

Avidya is a mistaken idea, which has come with the jivatman from the beginning. Avidya is the divine illusion, a kind of veil, a defect of psychic vision. This avidya is the supreme power called maya, which the scriptures have not been able to define. On account of maya, a veil is created and through that veil prakriti is born. Avidya is the source of I-ness, attraction, repulsion and fear of death. Just as the seed is the cause of the whole tree, in the same way, avidya is the source of the other four kleshas or afflictions. Avidya is the parent of them all. From avidya, asmita is born; from asmita, raga; from raga, dwesha, and from dwesha, abhinivesha.

How does the sense of I-ness arise?

Swami Satyananda: Asmita, or I-feeling, is an offshoot of avidya and is defined in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:6):

Drigdarshanashaktyorekaatmatevaasmitaa.

Asmita is the identity of purusha with buddhi.

Generally, the awareness that 'I am' is mixed with the awareness of this existence as the body, mind and actions. A prince in the garb of a beggar is identifying himself with the role he is playing; this is asmita. Purusha, the totality of consciousness, identifies with buddhi, the vehicle. For example, one sees the bus coming, but really the bus is being driven by a driver. When purusha is realized, there is no identification with the body or the intellect. But at present one is not aware of purusha, and this non-awareness is asmita.

At a young age, Ramana Maharshi saw his own dead body in meditation, and he also saw that he was observing his own dead body. There were three persons: the dead body, the seer of it, and the seer of that seer. Asmita is the blending together of this threefold principle. Most people are in asmita, the feeling of "I am", which is the identification of the atman with the lower emanations.

How do ego and attachments lead to suffering?

Swami Satyananda: People think that they would be happy if they did not have a family or obligations, if they had a lot of money in the bank and did not have to work. There is a tendency to think, “I have to work for my family, parents and children, and that is why I have so much suffering.” Work, however, is not the cause of suffering, and interaction between two individuals is not the cause of suffering. The consequences of karma are not the cause of suffering. The cause of suffering is a person’s involvement with his own ego and attachments.

People feel that happiness and unhappiness spring from the results of their actions, from the karma, but this is not true. No karma causes pain. Pain springs from the attachment to the consequences or the result of the karma. The mind desires a certain result. There will be no pain if that desire, that mental impulse, is controlled and the concern is only with the performance of the karma. It is the desire that keeps the consequences of karma in the mind, which has to be renounced. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:22):

*Ye hi samsparshajaa bhogaa dukkhayonaya eva te;
Aadyantavantah kaunteya na teshu ramate budhah.*

The enjoyments that are born of action are the generators of pain only, for they have a beginning and an end, O Arjuna! The wise do not rejoice in them.

It is human nature to live a life of attachment. This instinct of attachment is so peculiar that it not only binds one by attachment to a large property, but also binds through attachment to a small needle, and the sufferings are the same. Suffering is not one’s ill luck. When actions are performed with personal attachment, the suffering starts. Actions done without attachment will not bear any fruit, either positive or negative. One who can love everybody in the world without involving himself will never suffer; one

who cannot will suffer. Even if there is attachment to just one person, there will be suffering. In *The Light of Asia* by Edwin Arnold, Lord Buddha says in his first sermon:

*You suffer from yourself.
None else compels you.
None other holds you that you live and die,
And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss its spokes of agony,
Its tire of tears, its nave of nothingness.*

Suffering arises with the sense of possession. A person stays somewhere for some days and feels that it is his place. He stays with a person for ten or twelve years and that person becomes his. He lives in a house for fifteen years and thinks it is his. He tills the land for a number of years and feels that he owns it. Man has a sense of possession, a sense of belonging; that is called *mamta*. The human mind is like a reed that clings if one touches it. If a person stays with someone or something for a long time, it becomes his habit. People have all sorts of habits: tea habit, drinking habit, marriage habit.

God gives and God receives. People are just instruments of God. They come with a bundle of karmas and return leaving the results of their karmas behind. They take nothing back with them. Whatever they earn here will have to be left behind. Tell me, can any person take anything with him when he leaves this world? When one proceeds on the final journey, one does not carry earthly acquisitions. No material wealth, land or cattle can be taken. The cars, the fleets of vehicles are left behind. The wife is left behind; she goes only to the doorstep. The physical body goes only as far as the burial ground.

Only the deeds performed during this lifetime are carried on the last journey. Everyone meets the same fate. Sometimes one lives in a fool's paradise and boasts of one's worldly possessions, but actually no one is great. Everyone becomes insignificant when reduced to ashes. One comes empty-handed and will return empty-handed. In between, if

something is acquired, one claims to be the sole owner and boasts, “This is mine.” But the fact is that this nest does not belong to anyone; it is like the resting place of a bird.

How do raga and dwesha cause suffering?

Swami Sivananda: The two currents of the mind, namely raga and dwesha, attraction and repulsion, are what constitute the world or samsara. In the *Yoga Sutras* (2:7–8), raga and dwesha are defined:

Sukhaanushayee raagah;

Duhkhaanushayee dweshah.

Raga is the liking accompanying pleasure. (7)

Dwesha is the repulsion accompanying pain. (8)

The mind gets intensely attached to pleasant objects through attraction; it derives pleasure from them. Wherever there is the sensation of pleasure, the mind is glued to the object that gives pleasure. This is called attachment, which only brings bondage and pain. When the object is either withdrawn or perishes, the mind feels unspeakable pain. Attraction is the root cause of human suffering.

The mind runs from those objects which give pain and the feeling of hatred arises. For instance, nobody likes a cobra, a tiger or a scorpion. Attraction and pleasure, repulsion and pain coexist. A worldly man is a slave of these two mighty and devastating currents, which toss him about hither and thither like a piece of straw. He smiles when he receives pleasure and weeps when he receives pain. He clings to pleasant objects and runs away from objects that cause pain. The desire for sensual enjoyment is deeply rooted in the minds of all. The rajasic mind is so framed that thoughts of enjoyment of one kind or another occupy it constantly.

People invent various sorts of subtle enjoyments. Modern science has made a marvellous contribution towards bringing forth refined ways of enjoyment. Modern civilization is

another name for sensual enjoyment. Hotels, cinemas and radios intensify sensual enjoyments. People invent new dishes and new drinks to satisfy the palate. Fashion in clothing and hairdressing makes vast strides every year. Even the person treading the path of truth wishes to find more lasting and intense sensual enjoyments by means of yogic practices. He wants to move about in celestial cars. He wants to taste the nectar of immortality underneath the *kalpa vriksha*, wish-fulfilling tree, side by side with Indra and other gods. He wants to hear celestial nymphs and gandharvas singing and dancing. These are all subtle temptations. The sincere aspirant will resolutely turn his back on all these refined, subtle, intense enjoyments now and hereafter. He will treat them all as vomited matter, as offal, as the urine of a donkey, or as poison.

This world is full of difficulties and troubles. No one, save a yogi, bhakta or jnani, is free from worldly miseries and anxieties. No matter where one goes, it is all the same. Likes and dislikes are the causes for doing good and bad deeds which bring pleasure and pain. Thus the round of births and deaths proceeds from time immemorial due to the six-spoke wheel of like, dislike, virtue, vice, pleasure and pain.

Do external events in the world cause suffering?

Swami Sivananda: The world can never hurt one. The five elements are the best teachers and they help in a variety of ways. The objects created by the Lord are all beneficial. Only the creation of man brings pain and misery through the five kleshas. Ignorance is the fertile soil which bears an abundant crop of the rest. Egoism manifests only due to ignorance. Egoism is a specific form of ignorance. Wherever there is egoism, likes and dislikes invariably exist alongside it. The mind becomes attached wherever there is pleasure. If the mind likes pomegranate, it becomes attached to this fruit, as it derives pleasure from eating it. The mind runs after objects that have been associated with agreeable experiences in the past. This is attachment due to liking. The mind runs

away from objects which have caused pain; this is dislike. Clinging to bodily life, or fear of death, is born of liking only. It is nothing but attachment.

The kleshas are the faults of man himself. They bind him to the outside objects and reduce him to piteous slavery. The five afflictions remain as tendencies, even when they are not overtly operating. These afflictions and tendencies can be attenuated by yogic discipline; the object of yoga is to weaken them. The five kleshas are stumbling blocks to the attainment of self-realization. On account of ignorance people have forgotten their original divine glory, their true status of godhood and their immortal, blissful, divine nature. Owing to ignorance the physical body has been mistaken for the Self. This is the primal mistake, but it is a serious mistake indeed.

Wherever there is egoism, there is the play of the two currents, raga and dwesha, attraction and repulsion, or like and dislike. A person performs actions due to likes and dislikes, and takes birth in bodies to reap the fruits of those actions. Avidya or ignorance is the root-cause of human suffering and tribulation. It is the cause of karma and rebirth. One can only become free from avidya through knowledge of the imperishable atman. In this state one is victorious over death and merges in the immortal sat-chit-ananda Brahman, the absolute.

One can attain knowledge of the Self by changing the mental outlook and by purifying the heart and intellect. The mind, prana, body and senses are only instruments. The real seer is the Self, who is pure, unchanging, eternal, self-luminous, self-existent, self-contained, infinite and immortal. When one begins to identify with this immortal, all-pervading Self, all miseries will come to an end. The flame of a lamp destroys immense darkness. Similarly, the knowledge of the Self destroys ignorance. Therefore, one should attain knowledge of the Self, become illumined and go about happily.

PAIN AND EVOLUTION

How do pain and suffering help anyone?

Swami Sivananda: Pain is a silent teacher. Pain corrects, educates and disciplines the soul. It infuses mercy in the heart. It softens and purifies the hard heart. It develops willpower. It fills the heart with sympathy. It makes a proud person humble. Just as iron is shaped on the anvil by heating it, so also a person's character is moulded by blows, knocks and pains. Just as impure gold becomes pure by melting it in the crucible several times, so also a person becomes pure by being burnt in the furnace of pain.

Philosophy aims at finding out the cause of this pain and tries to eradicate the pain by prescribing suitable remedies. Yet it is this pain that turns the mind of a person towards God. Knocks and blows of a severe type wean the mind from sensual objects and turn it towards the spiritual path.

Pain and poverty, evil and misery mould the character more than pleasure and wealth. Poverty has its own advantages. Censure and blows are better teachers than praise and honour. Pain is a better teacher than pleasure. Poverty is a better teacher than wealth. Pain and poverty develop endurance. Adi Shankaracharya, the greatest philosopher and genius the world has ever produced, was born in a poor family. Lord Jesus was born the son of a carpenter. Poor people exert to achieve greatness, whereas the sons of rich people lead happy-go-lucky lives of luxury and inertia.

Several knocks immediately produce viveka and vairagya, change the angle of vision and raise the spiritual fire that lies within. One learns useful lessons daily through pain, suffering, poverty, privation and sickness. Pain is the sweet messenger from God and will turn the mind towards God.

How does one benefit from suffering?

Swami Satyananda: Pain purifies one and, in the same way, every situation faced in life is meant for one's evolution. Suffering is necessary for purification of karma, but nobody

likes to suffer. Nobody wants suffering. No one prays, "God, make me suffer." Who would ever ask this? People only pray for a good husband or wife, pretty children, a comfortable home and everything to be nice: no sickness, no quarrels, no divorce, no theft, no accident and no death. But this is not the right way! One should never be afraid of suffering. What do saints pray for? They say, "God, give me more suffering, so that I will remember you every minute of the day and night. God make me suffer more and more, physically, mentally and emotionally, so that my soul will analyze and enquire, and thereby become more and more self-aware." Those people who have suffered have reached the heights, and those nations which have suffered have also reached the heights.

In ordinary life, nobody wants to suffer, but everybody is suffering. Everybody wants happiness, but nobody has it; people are always unhappy. Suffering is the basic law of life, the basic process of evolution. What is evolution? A plant evolves from a seed, a flower from the plant, and fruit from the flower. Evolution is the progressive unfoldment of the essence of everything. Man has to evolve spiritually, not physically. In spiritual life suffering has to be understood in the light of evolution.

The suffering that comes into one's life is meant to accelerate one's evolution. If one suffers from physical disease, one will learn to live in a healthier way. If one gets into trouble due to misbehaviour, one will learn how to behave better.

Most of the jivanmuktas, saints, prophets and avatars had tragic lives. Christ, Rama and Sri Krishna were powerful people. They could have avoided tragedy, but they realized that pain was a blessing. Pain is the crucible for one who wants to become a superman. In the words of Swami Sivananda: "Pain is a crucible into which Nature throws a man whenever she wishes to mould him into a sublime superman." This applied to Christ, Rama and Sri Krishna.

Rama was born into a royal family with all its riches, but how was his life spent? For twelve years he lived in the ashram of his guru, Vasishtha. There he slept on the floor, tended the cows, cleaned the ashram and worked day and night. When he returned home after twelve years, he was married. That was a joyful part of his life. After that, he was exiled to the forest for fourteen years. Then Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, and Rama had to organize an army and fight for her. When Sita was back and they both returned to Ayodhya after fourteen years, there were scandals and ultimately Sita had to be abandoned. Isn't this story that is told in the *Ramayana* a tragedy?

What is the story of Christ's life if not a tragedy? The life of Sri Krishna was also a tragedy. Before he was even conceived by his mother he was on the hit-list of Kamsa, who was his uncle and the king of Mathura. Throughout his life he was on the run, and in the end he was assassinated. If these great men were avatars, why were their lives filled with tragedy? If Christ was the son of God, why did he have to undergo suffering? Without suffering nothing improves, nothing grows, nothing evolves and nothing becomes brilliant or illumined.

That is why sannyasins and monks impose suffering on themselves if they have no suffering in their lives. They must live lives of suffering. If one studies the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, one will know how he suffered.

Many people who were born on this earth have endured suffering and thereby risen to greatness. Mahatma Gandhi brought freedom to India without weapons, with dignity, pride and gentleness, but one fine evening an assassin shot him. Why do such people experience tragedies? If they were to avoid suffering, they would set a bad example. Mankind would also try to avoid suffering. If there is no pain in life, one should impose suffering and poverty on oneself in order to purify the mind. Suffering is certainly better than enjoying.

Suffering makes the mind more alert and the body more resilient. Each and every atom of the physical body, each

and every thought of the mind is alert. During suffering the whole body is on an emergency setting. While enjoying the pleasures of life, *bhoga*, most of the senses are doped. Therefore, the great saints and rishis and other awakened people have chosen suffering rather than enjoyment. They have always prayed, “Give me more suffering so that I may develop a better quality of enlightenment!” Here the purpose of suffering is enlightenment. The suffering is not important when the purpose is enlightenment.

Why is it that an aspirant may sincerely practise sadhana and austerities and yet continue to suffer in life?

Swami Sivananda: The Lord gives food even to the frogs that live between the rocks. Why has He failed in the case of an aspirant? This is a great wonder! Has He failed in His duty? This cannot be. He is merciful and benevolent! Is it because He wants to develop the constructive qualities of courage, presence of mind, endurance, mercy and love, thus making His instrument fitter for His divine *lila*, His divine play? Yes, this must be the case. The struggling and sincere aspirant experiences many troubles and difficulties, for he has to march quickly on the path to reach the doorway to the kingdom of supreme peace and bliss.

Princess Mira renounced the pomp and glory of the palace and walked into the burning sands of Rajputana. She starved on her way to Vrindavan. She slept on the ground and lived on alms. The Pandavas underwent countless sufferings, even when Sri Krishna was their companion. Draupadi was placed in a situation of great distress, even though she had Bhima, Arjuna and Dharmaputra to fight for her. Ordinary sufferings are nothing when compared to the persecutions borne by the five Pandavas, Sri Rama, and Mira. King Harischandra had to serve in a cremation ground and do the work of an untouchable to maintain truthfulness. Suffering develops the will and moulds an aspirant on the spiritual path.

Is suffering really necessary on the path of spiritual evolution?

Swami Satyananda: Who would agree that enlightenment is possible for those who are involved in gross sensual life? This may be said in order to encourage people and to draw them towards spiritual life, but frankly speaking, it is not true! I may say to people, “Oh, you can lead any life and still have enlightenment,” but this is not true. There is a process of enlightenment. There is definitely a road that takes one to enlightenment, and it takes one through suffering. This suffering can be considered as penance.

Who will tell people to undergo suffering? A politician, an industrialist? No. Only the sages and saints, the people who have a little knowledge about the inner life, have said this. No monarch, intellectual or shopkeeper has said it. Only saints and sages with certain intuition have said it. Naturally, there is no need to doubt their intentions as they have nothing to do with how society runs. They are only concerned with how one will get a better quality of experience and a better quality of enlightenment.

Why should one welcome suffering?

Swami Satyananda: My mother loves me, but if I have a physical problem, she will have me operated upon. At the time of the operation, I will cry with pain, but I cannot say that my mother is cruel. Tulsidas says:

*Although the child, while being operated upon,
Feels the pain and cries helplessly,
The mother does not mind the child's agony,
Her sole aim being to relieve his disease.
In the same way the Lord removes the pride
Of His servant for the servant's own welfare.
Shaking off all suspicions and doubts,
Tulsidas implores one to worship such a Lord.*

What is suffering? Suffering is a blessing in disguise. Everyone is afraid of suffering, and no one wants to suffer.

However, suffering is a means of realizing and exterminating evil karma. It should be welcomed, just as one welcomes a lifesaving operation. There are people who do not like suffering, and therefore they feel it more. There are those who enjoy suffering; thereby they are able to increase their tolerance and will.

Fortunate was Christ, who was crucified; fortunate were Socrates and Mansoor. What about Mira and Dayananda? How unfortunate is a person who finds himself allured by praise and favours, flowers and merits? Misfortune is unsurpassed! When trials come to one's door, one cries aloud for help to kick them away, but one only kicks divine chances. Is this understood?

Why is suffering necessary?

Swami Satyananda: Pain and suffering strengthen the nervous system and make the body and mind strong. This is the principle, but most people have difficulty accepting it. Nobody wants to suffer from physical pain, mental agony, affliction or discomfort. When one is amidst the pleasures of life, the mind regresses into a tamasic state, as there is no conflict. The mental conflicts are more or less resolved or at least subdued, as everything is pleasant. When one gains pleasure and solace from friendships and establishes oneself in comfortable situations, there is an end to physical, mental and emotional evolution. The key to evolution is conflict.

The mind evolves from the tamasic to the rajasic state and from the rajasic to the sattwic state. Mental growth is divided into five stages: dull, dissipated, oscillating, one-pointed and controlled. These five stages of the mind range over the three levels of the gunas. The level of tamas is either predominantly or totally dull. It is dull because it has no desires, no conflict, no frustrations, no agony, nothing. If it obtains things, that's all right; if it doesn't, that's also all right. The mind constantly compromises, so that it can avoid having to take action, either to attain something or to cope

with the disappointment. That is precisely why yoga begins with disappointment, mental depression and frustration.

Everybody has expectations. One expects something from life, whether one is married or single, a businessman or a swami, a family man with a steady job or a homeless vagabond. When a person expects something from life, he is evolving in one particular direction. If the expectation is fulfilled, the direction remains unchallenged. When a person gets what he wants, whether it is money, love, friendship, power, peace, cooperation or whatever, he just enjoys it, but it doesn't help develop any other realm of awareness.

Suppose a person has been working towards a goal for many years and finally finds it can't be attained. What happens? An extra awareness develops within his mind and takes the form of frustration, mental agony, worry or conflict. If there is frustration or depression in the mind, but no conflict, one loses the battle. If there is frustration and conflict, however, one accepts the challenge. Once the challenge is accepted, the conflict is followed by struggle. Of course, struggle is never without conflict, but conflict can be without struggle. The struggle brings one back and forth and from point to point.

From time to time people's ideas and evaluations of life undergo changes, as they are not decisive about what they are going to do. One moment they are going to do this and the next they are going to do that. This means the mind is confronted by two ideas, and this direct confrontation gives momentum to the development of awareness and the mind. When the mind is torn between two ideas, there is definitely physical and mental suffering. This is a positive experience, as there is an effort to bring an end to suffering and an attempt to understand the meaning behind suffering or to transcend the experience of suffering.

A person who can accept suffering will, therefore, have deeper and more enduring spiritual experiences. Most people, however, have weak minds and suffer from infirmity of will. They want their lives to pass pleasantly and smoothly.

They wish for amiable friends, obedient children, loving parents, a friendly society, a luxurious centrally heated house and a lot of money, as they do not want to subject their mind to worry. This is called tamoguna, the dull state of mind.

When the mind becomes sattwic, almost one-pointed or completely controlled, it doesn't matter whether the circumstances in life are pleasant or unpleasant. It makes no difference so far as the evolution of the mind is concerned. The people who are prepared to suffer are the ones who survive emotional, mental, social and political accidents and all the catastrophes of nature. Such people have enabled mankind to survive for all these millions of years.

Why should suffering be accepted or chosen? What are its benefits?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga and similar sciences advise people to expose themselves to a little suffering precisely for the purpose of strengthening their personal endurance. In fact, voluntary suffering, *tapasya*, penance or austerity, is an essential practice for those who have the conveniences and luxuries of life, if progress is to be made in spiritual life. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:5):

*Yajnadaanatapahkarma na tyaaajyam kaaryameva tat;
Yajno daanam tapashchaiva paavanaani maneeshinaam.*

Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be abandoned, but should be performed; sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise.

Under this system, people renounce comforts, tasty food, nice clothes, beautiful homes and live a simple life for a while. Of course, this cannot be the permanent structure of life; one just puts oneself through a training period. During this time, reorientation of the mind takes place. The bad habits, false values of life and dependent tendencies of the mind are completely eradicated, and confidence develops. A person who can tolerate every form of suffering will have

great confidence. There are many stories about people who have suffered. They are the ones who enacted deeds of confidence, which have gone down in history and are remembered even to this day.

Sadhakas, yogis, swamis and householders should remember that a period of life must be devoted to self-imposed suffering. That is one of the most important parts of yoga. Suffering is the salt of life. Gold is derived only after entering the furnace. Suffering is not one's enemy; it is one's friend. Happiness comes to destroy one. Spiritual seekers must understand that God is the only source and the only support. If He wants one to do sadhana, one should do it. If He wants one to enjoy life, one should enjoy it. If He wants one to suffer, one must suffer. One must become His servant. One has no choice, because a servant has no choice.

After all, why did He send us here in human form? After evolving through a great many incarnations, we have become human beings. Yet, even after becoming human, we behave in the same way as an animal behaves.

What is the positive outcome of accepting pain?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda was fond of the philosophy of pain and suffering. He felt that through pain, no matter what form it took, the creative faculties and energies became manifest. When there is suffering and pain and the acceptance of pain, willpower and determination will increase and new methods to transcend the suffering and pain will be investigated.

To improve the mind, therefore, pain is necessary. Pain represents the evolutionary process of consciousness. If there is pleasantness and pleasure all the time, the faculties of the mind do not evolve, and a kind of stagnation takes place within the personality.

Pain and suffering are not accepted, as everyone is under the influence of the *vrittis*, the modifications of mind, and always wants something which is pleasant and beautiful. In the spiritual tradition, tapasya or austerity has been accepted

as being a means to become physically, psychologically and spiritually strong.

Only realized souls can use pleasure, contentment and joy in order to reach higher dimensions of consciousness. Others do not have that ability and, therefore, at some stage, acceptance of suffering is a must.

SUFFERING AS A GOAL

What kind of suffering can be avoided?

Swami Satyananda: The present suffering has to be undergone and finished, but one can avoid what is yet to come. According to the law of karma, the present suffering that has become ripe cannot be set aside and must be finished by experiencing it, but the future pain and misery can be changed. It is said in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (2:16):

Heyam duhkhamanaagatam.

Suffering which has not yet come should be avoided.

For example, the harvest that is being reaped cannot be altered, but the next harvest can be modified by changing the seeds and other conditions. The bullet that has been fired cannot be brought back, but the one which has not yet been shot can be stopped.

Similarly, the future fruits of karma can be modified, depending on what is done now. In human life there are certain karmas which become ripe, and their effects must be experienced in the form of destiny, in the form of happiness and misery. One should use discrimination, do tapasya and sadhana, and undergo these karmas. However, the karmas which are due to ripen in the future may be avoided by taking right action now. According to the law of karma, there is one department of karma which is beyond a person's control, but there is another department of karma which can be amended or modified. Thus the sutra declares that the suffering which is yet to come can be avoided.

Is it all right to seek relief from present suffering in some way, or should it be approached differently?

Swami Satyananda: One can turn to God, seek the satsang of sadhus, go on pilgrimages, undertake austerities or cry bitterly, but after some relief has been obtained, one should leave the source and means of such solace. One unconsciously tries to transcend the pain, to separate oneself from that experience. That is what happens in yoga. One separates oneself from the experience of 'I am' and becomes a witness, a *sakshi*. As a witness, one is always enjoying and learning everything, but unconsciously. People are in the school of life all the time, but the tragedy is they don't realize it. That is why in every course there is a compulsory test. The examinations have to be taken: birth and death, pain and pleasure, suffering and enjoyment, tragedy and comedy. How does one pass? How does one come out untouched, unhurt and unscathed?

Sometimes one runs away when wounded, but all one needs to do is become aware and remain aware of all the tests that are being taken. During youth, school is attended formally, but education continues throughout life. In the classroom one learns about algebra and geometry theorems and what a triangle and a hexagon are. Similarly, in previous lifetimes one has already learned about jealousy, love, hatred, anger and cravings. That knowledge comes in handy now. All animals and creatures belong to the primary class. Man is like a matriculate. He is out of high school and on the threshold of college education. After entering college on the basis of what he has already learned at school, he understands more.

Isn't it better to remove the present suffering, if possible?

Swami Satyananda: Death is better than sacrificing one's principles. If someone says, "I will be able to serve humanity better if I have treatment and get well," it is egoism. God is doing everything. Who is anyone to do it? Human beings are born in the world like kernels of corn on the cob. Thousands

of people are born and thousands die every second. What will happen if I or someone else dies? Nothing will happen. Much better personalities will be born. After all, the world has not produced only one soul to guide humanity.

Someone may say, "I am undergoing this treatment for your benefit." But I would say, "No, I don't want you to." He might say, "That is because your mind is different and you cannot understand the realities. You speak of something very high." Then I would say, "No. I understand the realities better than you do. Let the suffering come. It is better to suffer for the sake of one's principles." If suffering is removed by medicine, by yoga, or by controlling certain laws of nature, a person will be all right for a while. The prarabdha keeps quiet; the whole process goes underground. But the suffering comes up again the moment the mind is disturbed or the body becomes weak; only it is more intense and keen. Suffering in life cannot be minimized.

How should one look at suffering and happiness?

Swami Niranjanananda: After acquiring a body and mind, one looks for happiness. That is the law of life; a child looks for happiness as much as an old person. The main struggle in life is to be free of suffering and discover happiness. Everybody makes every effort to experience happiness. The present mental make-up, however, does not correspond to the experience of happiness, for happiness is the state of ananda, bliss. That state of bliss is experienced only by a mind which is not under bondage.

When the mind is not free, one may get a glimpse of happiness but will be unable to stabilize its experience. That glimpse will be followed by sorrow. When one feels happy, the mind is completely free. How elated one feels; the whole world shines, the mind feels light, the body feels light, one is riding on high waves. That is the experience of freedom, liberation. When sorrow appears, it feels as if there is a mountain load on top; one feels tied down to the experience of narrowness and restlessness. The meaning of moksha,

liberation, is freedom from sorrow. It means to free up that which is bound. The bondage that ties a person down is not the senses or the mind. The senses and the mind are always there. One can be free of the results, the circumstances that take away the state of happiness, which are the sorrows, the afflictions, ignorance and fear of death. Karmas are connected to these joys and sorrows. The gunas and the instincts are affected by joy and sorrow. Even a tamasic person will experience sattwa, peace and bliss, when there is happiness, and a sattwic person will experience tamasic conditions due to suffering. Therefore, the aim of karma in this world is the acquisition of happiness through different means.

God thought of happiness and sorrow, and prakriti has implanted them in one's nature. Joy makes one weak, while suffering awakens the tendency of *purushartha*, self-effort. Those who run after happiness remain weak, but those who endure suffering acquire strength of mind. The finest achievements in the world have taken place due to confrontation with suffering, not due to pleasure. If Siddhartha hadn't seen human suffering, he would not have become Buddha. Therefore, the sages say to make suffering the basis of evolution. The inclination for exertion that will awaken within, the sattwa that will be acquired as a result, is unparalleled.

Kunti said the same thing to Sri Krishna at the end of the Mahabharata war. The great war was over, Yudhishtira, Kunti's son, had been crowned king, and there was peace and prosperity in the kingdom. Sri Krishna decided to return to his kingdom. He bade farewell to everyone, but Kunti began pleading with him not to leave. She said, "Now that we have peace and prosperity, you are leaving, but when we were full of sorrow, you were always in our hearts. I wish for suffering always in our lives so we can remember you and always be in your presence." Kunti realized that suffering has a spiritual purpose. When there is suffering, God is present. When there is happiness, there is separation for Him

Who goes towards spirituality, to God and to saints and sages? Only a person who is unhappy. Suffering brings one closer to God. Joy and sorrow are due to prakriti, not due to God. God does not want anyone to be happy or unhappy. He wants everyone to be content, whatever their condition. Prakriti manifests as yoga and maya and brings forth both joy and sorrow. One who achieves the end of desires receives jnana, knowledge. The rest continue to struggle with pain and pleasure. Many come to spirituality in search of joy. Joy and happiness should be experienced, but without forgetting the aim of life. The aim of life is to free oneself from bondage so that total freedom can be experienced.

What is the importance of having a goal in order to transcend suffering in life?

Swami Satyananda: Those people who are suffering due to lack of intelligence are not going to obtain any spiritual benefits by suffering. Only those who are dedicated to a goal can purify the mind, open the doors of perception and be in touch with the deeper parts of the mind through suffering.

The goal may be spiritual or non-spiritual. There are sufferings and hardships which people undergo with a purpose. Many saints, rishis and munis, scientists, expeditionists, mountaineers, leaders and even astronauts undergo hardships in life. But these hardships don't mean anything to such people, as they have their goals before them. Marco Polo travelled by the Silk Route to China. It was not easy to travel from Europe to China in those days; it was a hardship, but he had a goal in life. The rishis and munis went to the Himalayas, isolated themselves, took frugal meals and lived on almost nothing, without wife, children or family. This was hardship, but they had a goal in view.

A person with a definite goal, therefore, doesn't mind undergoing hardship in order to achieve that goal. It is not that one likes to undergo hardship; nobody likes it. Nobody should invite it, but while pursuing the goal, one comes across many hardships. Some people break down amidst

hardships, but a few survive them. Hardships are worthwhile when one knows what is to be achieved through them, but there is no meaning in suffering and hardship unless one is pursuing a goal. A mountaineer may be left on an icy mountain peak without a sleeping bag, cigarette or brandy. That is suffering, but what is important is the goal which he is pursuing.

However, if sufferings come to a person without any goal and he accepts them, they will destroy him. Suffering has destroyed many people and civilizations. Many people in the world are suffering from starvation or deprivation, but their suffering won't give them emancipation or purification. A person must have a purpose, a goal; otherwise suffering must be avoided. One should fight such suffering; one should not compromise with it. Suffering without any goal takes one into the dark areas of human evolution.

A person with a goal in life does not even recognize pain and pleasure. A man who decides to start a business may have lots of difficulties with suppliers, money, employees, or the government. He does not invite these difficulties; he is simply pursuing his goal. He wants to make money or produce something; there may be a selfish or an unselfish motive. In any case, he undergoes hardship, but this is all right. Such difficulties are natural and he must bear them.

A wealthy textile merchant in America lost his business when his store burned down and he became a pauper overnight. He returned to his home town for a while. One day he read in a newspaper about the possibility of gold deposits in the northern part of America. The government was encouraging different agencies to investigate it. So he went to the market and purchased a gold detector, a jeep, some supplies, and off he went. He met with a lot of hardships in the mountains, but finally he found the gold deposit. On his way down from the mountain he collapsed and was picked up by a patrol party. Within three days of his return, he sold his discovery and became a millionaire. This is one simple example of hardship with a purpose, even to

the point of death. There are many other examples of great warriors, saints and explorers.

In India, there is a love story about Laila and Majnu. Laila was a beautiful girl and Majnu a handsome young man. They both loved each other. Majnu wanted to obtain Laila and he underwent great hardship for that purpose. There was another couple, Shiri and Farhad, who loved each other, but the father of the girl said to the boy, "Okay, you can marry her, but you have to dig a canal, a waterway, from this place to that place before sunrise." The whole night the fellow was digging, suffering hardship, but the goal was there.

What exactly is meant by a downfall?

Swami Satyananda: I have noticed that many times people submit to lower situations in life. Perhaps they are exhausting their karma. After all, everyone has to exhaust karmas, and not all the karmas are auspicious. What about the inauspicious karmas? During a certain stage of life, when inauspicious karmas are being exhausted, it may seem as if there has been a fall. It is not a question of where someone is, what he does, or how far he falls. The question is: what has this event got to do with karma? Even though the mind is disturbed by the passion of life, a person is simultaneously plodding along the spiritual path. This is important for everybody to understand.

As long as a person has a path and a destination in life, and his energies and pursuits are focused, no matter what he does, what he is, what he feels, how tragic or wretched he may become, it is not a downfall. But if there is no path and no destination, if his pursuits are not focused, even the best and most noble life is of no consequence. A person may be charitable, compassionate, helpful, truthful, non-violent and pure, but if he doesn't have a path and a goal in life, he is nowhere.

One must remember, therefore, what a person is striving for when considering his downfall. A child wants to stand

up on his two feet, but he falls down. Is this a downfall? No, it is a process of finding stability in his body. Every time he falls, he tries to get up again. Maybe he will fall for two years, but finally he will be able to walk and run fast. Why? Because he wants to. Everybody should have a path and a goal, as without these the mental condition will be wretched. A person with a destination will always remain optimistic.

Why isn't suicide an effective answer to suffering?

Swami Sivananda: Pleasure and pain in life are the rewards of the good and bad actions of an individual. If a man suffers, it reminds him to ennoble his life and make his future happy through the performance of good deeds, self-discipline and right effort. When a convict escapes from prison, the law demands that he should be rearrested and given added punishment, as he not only committed an offence but tried to avoid punishment. So it is with a person who tries to escape from suffering by inflicting death on himself, rather than attempting to improve his future or accepting what is beyond help. The person who commits suicide will suffer further in a spirit body for a period of time, and then take a lower form of birth to work out his karma. Putting an end to the present gross physical body by force does not help to end suffering.

The sufferings and pleasures that are due to a person because of past actions won't go away until and unless he experiences them completely. On the contrary, one invites more miseries by suicide, for it may take some time to obtain another gross body in which the effects of past actions can be experienced. During this interim period, one may have to move about in the form of a *preta* or ghost. Besides, one has no right to take a life, even though it may be one's own. Suicide is a crime not only in the eyes of God but also in the eyes of social law. Both suicide and the killing of other beings are considered to be great sins, as they block the course of evolution of the jiva. There is no benefit to be had by committing suicide.

What are the spiritual consequences for a person who takes their own life?

Swami Satyananda: Suicide interferes with a person's evolution. This delays the process of spiritual life, as after suicide one remains in darkness for a long time before being reborn. The person who commits suicide is always more attached to the life that he has renounced and left. This attitude blocks further progress, and the transmigration into another body becomes difficult and is hopelessly delayed.

Proper rituals must be conducted, therefore, for a person who has committed suicide to free him from that bondage. Souls who have committed suicide are invisible, they have subtle bodies. The use of mantra can help to free them. From the spiritual point of view, suicide is not freedom from any problem; it is getting into another problem

If a person does not want to live, what should he do?

Swami Niranjanananda: People who do not want to live have no focus in their lives. It is necessary for everyone to have a specific focus, direction or aim in life. One has to strive and be determined in order to attain that aim; the effort should not be half-hearted. One should have the *sankalpa shakti*, the willpower to achieve what one aspires for in life. Life is successful and fulfilled when there is a focus. Life has no meaning when there is no focus. The focus should not only be on having money, property, good friends and family. These are not the only parameters of success in life. They are the outcomes of a person's effort, wisdom and understanding and ability to manage situations and circumstances. Therefore, they cannot be the focus.

The focus should be transformation of the gross nature of the mind. Whether one is a renunciate or deeply involved in worldly activities, whether a yogi or a bhogi, a recluse or a social activist, success in life is attained only when the lower, gross and animal tendencies have been transformed into positive qualities. If depression, frustration, dissatisfaction, social or financial problems become the cause of the desire to

take one's life, the soul is not free. The spirit remains bound by the karmas, samskaras and desires, and that bondage of spirit is anti-evolution. God does not give individuals life so that they can take it away. God gives life so one can learn to cherish, respect and use it for the welfare of everyone.

The members of a family are naturally concerned for each other's welfare; that is one stage. The same concern and care can expand to others, to many people. That is another stage, where the quality of caring and nurturing expands to such an extent that the concept of family is not confined to the few who live nearby such as one's husband, wife and children, but encompasses other people who are not one's own. In that way attending to the welfare of all becomes a selfless act and not a selfish act. True happiness comes with selfless action. There is happiness in selfish acts also, but that is temporary. Stability of happiness is attained when one is able to perform a selfless act.

God has given this opportunity, this life, to express the appropriate human qualities and to become a master of the environment, situations and circumstances, not a slave to them. Appreciation of the human qualities, strengths and weaknesses becomes the trademark of life. When appreciation becomes the trademark of life and when there is focus in life, then life is fulfilled.

YOGIC APPROACH TO SUFFERING

Which methods help to overcome suffering?

Swami Satyananda: The great, enlightened people have all realized the same thing, but the language and symbols are different. In tantra, it is called liberation, in Buddhism nirvana, in Christianity salvation. Christianity talks about suffering; in yoga it is called austerity, in Buddhism spiritual effort. The terminology is different, the method of explanation and expression is also different, but ultimately they speak about the same thing. There is an eternal existence which is beyond pain and suffering. In order

to experience this eternal union one has to pass through various phases of the mind, including *dukha* or suffering.

Christianity teaches that suffering can be overcome. In Buddhism there are four eternal truths: (i) there is pain, (ii) there is a cause for the pain, (iii) the pain can be removed, and (iv) there is a way to remove it. Similarly, yoga and tantra say that one suffers if one is far from the self. If one is close to the spirit, one is not unhappy. The purpose of yoga is to eliminate the root of all suffering. What is the root of suffering? The mind is the root of suffering. How to eliminate the root? By transforming the mind. All the great people and the scriptures talk about one and the same thing.

How does transforming the mind overcome suffering?

Swami Satyananda: Suffering is known as *dukha* and enjoyment as *sukha*, and pleasure and pain are qualities of the mind. When the mind is withdrawn in deep sleep, there is no awareness of pain or pleasure. The experience of pleasure and pain does not belong to the object, it belongs to the mind. What is pleasant today can be painful tomorrow, and what is painful today can be pleasant the next day. No object is absolutely pleasant or painful. An individual or an object that one loves today is pleasant, but the same person or object can give one pain in due course. This is completely dependent on the mind.

In order to overcome suffering, therefore, one has to totally transform the mind. Up to a particular point the mind experiences pain and pleasure, but after some time it does not. This is the philosophy of suffering. People suffer on account of the incompleteness of their experience. If one were able to see more broadly, there would be no suffering. Desire, attachment, jealousy, fear and frustration cause suffering. These are the things which should be overcome.

How to overcome desire, fear and jealousy? This is what must be understood. Just because fear or desires are known, does not mean that they can be transcended. The mind must be transformed. Transformation of the mind is important if

one wants to transcend pain and suffering. When the mind expands, one transcends suffering.

According to the various traditions, how can suffering be overcome?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yogis knew that suffering would increase in the future. Yogis are thinkers who are able to apply certain aspects of yoga in order to improve the conditions of normal life. In antiquity, only one tradition existed. It emphasized the discovery of the inner nature and harmonizing the inner nature with the outer nature. In this process people from different parts of the world learned how to go within and devised practices of meditation, contemplation and introspection. At the same time they tried to understand and harmonize the outer nature and to build a bridge between the inner and outer nature. Their form of understanding the inner nature was through a process of worship, going back to nature, appreciating the environment, worshipping the cosmic forces. They realized that the cosmic forces are represented inside and the internal forces are represented in the cosmos. It was a natural and spontaneous way of life.

Something happened along the way and the spontaneity of life was overshadowed by another kind of search. That search was to find happiness and to overcome the suffering and pain that are encountered in day-to-day life. Overcoming this suffering became the focal point of many of the ancient traditions. For example, Buddha spoke about overcoming human suffering. He spoke about knowing the cause of suffering, knowing what suffering is and overcoming it. He said that freedom from pain and suffering can be attained in the state of nirvana. Many other masters, thinkers and philosophers also say that evolution in life depends on the ability to manage and overcome personal, social and cosmic suffering.

Each tradition evolved a philosophy and set of practices by which it was possible to find harmony in life. Buddhism,

Samkhya, Vedanta, Tantra and Yoga all came into existence as a result of this search. Each philosophy took the idea of overcoming suffering one step further. Buddhism said: overcome the suffering which affects the personality, mind and nature through a process of meditation. Tantra said: overcome the limitations and suffering by observing life and by expanding the individual consciousness, so that it will not be confined to personal experience but will be able to encompass a broader range of experience. Overcome the limitations and suffering in life by awakening and harmonizing both the personal and cosmic forces.

Vedanta said: overcome the limitations of life by realizing the true nature of the Self. The true nature of the Self is unlimited whereas all the events and experiences of the world are limited. The vedantic concept said that truth is real and the world of name, form and idea is false. This world does not represent reality but is only a reflection of the cosmic reality. The reflection one sees in a mirror is not the real self. In the same way the self sees its reflection in the world and identifies with the world. The self identifies with the body and mind, with events and conditions, but these are only reflections, not the real identity.

Similarly, yoga said that to realize and know the inner self one has to find a balance between outer and inner life, which is one's true nature. These ideas show that the different traditions and beliefs have only one aim: to improve the quality of life and to overcome the conditions of the mind and personality which inhibit the growth of human nature.

How can suffering be endured?

Swami Sivananda: To bear with suffering and accept it as coming from God, as a blessing in disguise is great wisdom. Sri Adiguru Shankaracharya said in *Aparokshanubhuti* (v. 7):

Sahanam sarvaduhkhaanaam titikshaa saa shubhaa mataa.

The patient endurance of all sorrow and pain is known as titiksha, which is conducive to happiness.

Those who develop the power of endurance train themselves to rejoice in suffering. They think that everything is done by God for their own betterment and upliftment. By welcoming pain as a messenger of God, they remember Him, and that infuses more mercy and greater power of endurance in them. Such persons enjoy real bliss even amidst suffering. For them, pain will not be pain and suffering will not be suffering. There will be no necessity for the selfish worldly struggle to accumulate wealth. Greed and turmoil will vanish. Such people will rest in peace, they will rejoice within. This is not the philosophy of the stoics or the teaching of the pessimists. This is wonderful optimism that goads one on to realize the deep, abiding, eternal joy and unruffled peace of the Self within.

What is the importance of adjusting to suffering?

Swami Niranjanananda: One's perspective and attitude towards oneself and one's participation and involvement in life need to change. Social ills, personal problems and conflicts will always exist in the world and there is no way one can avoid or remove them. Therefore, it is advisable to learn how to accept and manage them. There is no need to look to the scriptures, to solutions from a counsellor or to the book of a master or teacher. One just has to work with oneself and cultivate a different dimension of the personality. This is the aim of yoga. It allows one to live, just as the soft tongue lives surrounded by thirty-two strong, hard and biting teeth.

A person who tries to find a solution to pain and suffering will not find any. The solution, however, comes naturally when one is able to adjust to it. When one adjusts to suffering, it ceases to be suffering. There is no such thing as pain or pleasure; it is only a symptom of adjustment. This process of adjustment is learned through yoga. One does not have to alter anything externally: it is only a positive adjustment in one's perception of life. In this way, every moment of the day becomes a practice of yoga, not only the hour spent in the classroom. If one can observe and

harmonize oneself, that is the real yoga – observation and harmonization. Yoga becomes a practice that is performed every moment of the day. That is the real essence of yoga, and it has to be combined with one’s lifestyle.

What is the approach of spiritually realized people to suffering?

Swami Satyananda: Such persons do not care at all for karmas. They do not worry about where their destiny is going to lead them or how the karmas will affect them. As a result, the process of exhaustion takes place more quickly. For most people suffering seems intense, but for them there is no suffering. The condition of mind is responsible for the expression and understanding of pain and pleasure. It is neither pain nor pleasure that is important. Peace and joy are one’s heritage, not suffering. The story of Mansoor, the great Sufi saint, illustrates this point well.

Mansoor often said, ‘Anal-Haq’, which means ‘I am the reality’. In Islam, they don’t believe that God is within. When the priests heard him crying, “Anal-Haq” in the morning hours while they were saying “Alla Hoo”, they asked, “Who is this heretic who says, ‘I am God’?” They called him to court and the Nawab asked, “What are you saying?” Mansoor replied, “Anal-Haq.” First they whipped him a number of times, but Mansoor went on repeating the japa of Anal-Haq constantly. So they said, “This man has practised so much japa he is unable to feel the whips. Now peel off his skin.” They cut his skin and began to peel it off. At that time the sound of ‘Anal-Haq, Anal-Haq, Anal-Haq’ came from every nerve and cell of his body. As long as they went on peeling off his skin they heard the mantra. Mansoor sacrificed his life as that was his conviction. He had to do it.

If yogis must also undergo the effects of karma, why are they said to be beyond suffering?

Swami Satyananda: Ordinary people have to suffer because they have no control over the fruition of their karmas. The

yogi, on the other hand, has complete control over the conditions which give rise to the effects of the karmas. There is one level of consciousness, one level of karma, one level of mind that undergoes suffering and enjoyment, according to the natural law of karma, but there is another level of mind which is absolutely free. This is the decisive point of yoga and hence must be understood clearly. Thus, a yogi has two minds. One undergoes the effects of prarabdha in daily life and enjoys the good and bad results of his past karma like ordinary people do. Then the yogi develops another inner channel in himself called *nirmana chitta*, which is the higher vehicle of consciousness, due to meditation on *mahatattva*, or *asmita*. At this level of consciousness there is no enjoyment of pain or pleasure. The average person has only the lower mind, hence he suffers. The yogi, on the other hand, has neither good nor bad karmas, due to the *nirmana chitta*.

Kabir has said that nobody is an exception to the rule; everyone who has a body has to undergo pain and pleasure. But still there is a difference. While the foolish man of the world undergoes the effects of karma with sorrow, crying and wailing, the yogi and the jnani undergo suffering with absolute knowledge, understanding and power. This is the secret that most people are confused about. Even a yogi cannot go beyond prarabdha. No one can escape the law of karma, but the yogi remains unaffected in the stream of karmas and their effects on *nirmana chitta*. Thereby the yogi discovers the door through which one escapes the cruelties of life and evolves a new method to face this life.

How can suffering be overcome?

Swami Sivananda: No one is free from pains, diseases, troubles and difficulties. One has to rest in the divine nature in order to overcome suffering; only then can strength be drawn to face the difficulties of life. Everyone is divine and should try to live up to it by feeling and realizing their divine nature. Do not murmur when difficulties come. Every difficulty is an opportunity to develop the power of

endurance and to grow strong. In this way the difficulties can be conquered one by one. One must be courageous and endure troubles with patience.

This is the beginning of a new life, a life of expansion, glory and divine splendour. Aspire to grow and expand. Build up all the *daiva-sampatti*, positive qualities, the fortitude, patience and courage which are dormant at present. Cultivate serenity of mind, tread the spiritual path and realize, “I am the Immortal Self”. Turn the mind towards God and never weep, even at the loss of near and dear relations. Birth and death are two illusory scenes in the marvellous drama of this world. They are all the jugglery of maya. In reality, nobody comes and nobody goes. Atman alone exists. Atman is Brahman, the immortal soul.

In order to overcome suffering always be hopeful and face all difficulties, tribulations and anxieties in life with a smile. Repeat the formula, “Even this will pass away.” Always try to be beyond grief and sorrow. By educating the will, develop tremendous inner spiritual strength whereby spiritual progress will be rapid. Allow the waves of love to arise constantly in the heart and bask in the sunshine of divine love. Meditate daily and experience the supreme bliss of eternal life.

What is the importance of equilibrium in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: The spiritual traditions say, keep to the middle path. Buddha advocated the middle path. He said, don't be a rightist, don't be a leftist (not in the political sense), but walk the middle path. Don't walk on the right side of the road or on the left side; be in the middle from where both sides can be seen.

The Upanishads have defined this middle path as being as sharp as the razor's edge. One has to tread carefully, since a little slip will cause one to bleed to death. This happens in life too. If one loses one's focus and is distracted, the journey stops there. The intentions and motivations stagnate at that point and there is no moving forward. Where there is a slip,

to the left or to the right, the journey ends there. If, however, one keeps walking carefully, with awareness, maintaining one's balance, equilibrium and equipoise, the distance of the journey can be covered. Therefore, equipoise, *samatvam*, is the highest quality of human life.

When equipoise becomes a powerful quality in life, a harmony sets in wherein one is not affected by desires and there is no hankering, craving or obsession for a result. This means that one has to change the conditioning of the mind. Even a baby hankers for things. Children and young adults desire other things. As one grows up, the world is viewed differently. As more experience is gained, the world is understood in a different light. This is the process of maturity. In each state, in each condition of life, there needs to be understanding of that particular condition, that particular desire and that particular need for the fulfilment of an expectation. This hankering after fulfilment is the cause of happiness or suffering, resulting in a self-oriented awareness.

People are so self-oriented that they often reject and hide from their own weaknesses as well as their own light. If there is one thing that a human being is afraid of in this world, it is their own luminosity. All desire luminosity, but when confronted with luminosity they say, "Enough." It happened to Arjuna. He said to Sri Krishna on the battlefield, "Show me your cosmic form." When Sri Krishna showed him the cosmic form, Arjuna said (11:45–46):

*Adrishtapoorvam hrishito'smi drishtvaa bhayena cha
pravyathitam mano me.
Tadeva me darshaya devaroopam-praseeda devesha
jagannivaasa.*

*Kireetinam gadinam chakrahastam-ichchhaami tvaam
drashtumaham tathaiva.
Tenaiiva roopena chaturbhujena sahasrabaaho bhava
vishvamoorte.*

I am delighted, having seen what has never been seen before; and yet my mind is distressed by fear. Show me Your previous form only, O God! Have mercy, O God of gods! O abode of the universe! (45)

I desire to see You as before, crowned, bearing a mace, with the discus in hand, in Your former form only, having four arms, O thousand-armed Cosmic Form! (46)

Arjuna begged Sri Krishna, “Please come back to your normal form, I like that one better. I can identify with that. I can’t identify with your cosmic form, I can’t identify with your luminosity. I can identify with you when I see you as myself.”

The gunas associate with karmas and give birth to the experience of joy and sorrow. Joy and sorrow are associated with success and failure. Finding a balance between the two is yoga. If there is inner balance in the success and failure of karmas, it is karma yoga. If there is inner balance in the success and failure of the intellect, it is jnana yoga. If there is inner balance in the emotions that flow towards desires and aspire to flow towards God, that is the beginning of bhakti yoga, and if the principle of balance is applied to the body, hatha yoga can be mastered.

Balance is a state of mind, not a practice of yoga. Therefore, the first yogic sadhana should be acquiring balance, harmony and equanimity. Asana and pranayama are physical practices. The internal sadhana should be the effort to achieve equanimity. This can be done through japa, mantra, observation of the mind, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga – there are many practices. These are all methods, but there comes a time when knowledge is achieved and one’s karma becomes attached to yoga.

Is it possible to minimize suffering through yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Suffering in life cannot be minimized, but the awareness of the suffering can be minimized by desensitizing some of the neurons in the brain and by

elevating the consciousness and the responses of the mind. The same suffering comes to me now that came twenty years ago, but now I do not feel the pain as my awareness is different. Before I was weeping and wanted to commit suicide, but now I am unaffected. The suffering is the same, the person is the same, but in different periods, under different conditions, it is felt more or less. Even a jivanmukta suffers due to prarabdha, but he does not feel it, as his consciousness has been elevated to such a great height. An ordinary man undergoes the same suffering, but he weeps and cries and may even lose his mental balance or commit suicide. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:23), Sri Krishna says:

*Tam vidyaad duhkhasamyogaviyogam yogasanjnitam;
Sa nishchayena yoktavyo yogo'nirvinna chetasaa.*

Let severance from union with pain be known by the name of yoga. This yoga should be practised with determination and with a non-despondent mind.

When suffering comes in any form, it should be accepted as a challenge, and an effort should be made to maintain steadiness of mind, intelligence and judgement. If the suffering is terrible, it is even more necessary to elevate the condition of the mind than to simply treat the body. One only has to elevate the mind and nothing else. If the mind does not suffer, the body also does not suffer. If the sufferings are so intense that one is unable to bear them, they must be suffered in the spirit of total surrender, resignation and patience – not with a view to getting better, but with a view to surrendering and being patient in the name of the supreme being, God or Purusha.

If someone says, “I have a headache,” I say, “Do not take medicine. Practise surrender, resignation and patience.” One should be able to bear the difficulties in life with the same spirit. That is the path of the gods, not the path of ordinary men. All the scriptures on bhakti speak of surrender, resignation and patience. It is the sum total of what they had

to say. Were they all wrong? Well, logically maybe, but not as far as reality is concerned. There must have been some reason behind what they said. The people who wrote the scriptures were not unreliable. The ultimate truth is always spoken by the seers and saints, who have come to different countries at different times and with different names, but with one voice.

There must be one principle in life. My principle is surrender, resignation and patience, as that is what I have learned from the seers. Everybody should have a strict principle in life. A person must say, "No, I surrender to God. Let His will be done," and he must practise it from moment to moment. There might be failure. I have failed a number of times. It is not possible to be one hundred percent true to one's convictions, and I am aware of that. But still I should practise, as I know that the trial will come, and at that time I must also do my best to practise this principle at every moment.

I believe in the will of God, not in the will of people. The will of the Lord reigns supreme, and this will goes on through me and through everyone. I do not know the will of God but I surrender, I resign, I let it be, that is all. Everything that happens is the will of God.

Is one's karma affected when helping someone who is suffering?

Swami Satyananda: Helping others is good karma; it eliminates the karmic stock and purifies the mind. If a close relative is suffering, it is natural to feel sorry, but suffering on behalf of a stranger shows unselfishness. It also means the individual personality has been transcended, which is why there is feeling for the stranger. When one feels the suffering of one's own people, it is called sympathy, but when one feels the suffering of others, it is called compassion. Mercy without selfishness is compassion, and mercy with self-interest is pity or sympathy.

What is the best way to remove suffering and bring happiness to others?

Swami Sivananda: One cannot completely remove all the suffering from this world. Just as in gout and rheumatism the pain and swelling shifts from one joint to another, so also if suffering is eradicated in one place, it manifests in another. The world is crooked. It is like the tail of a dog. So many avatars, yogis, acharyas, saints and prophets came into the world and preached, but still it is crooked, still it is in the same state. Therefore, one should not bother much about reforming the crooked world. This can never be done. One should reform oneself first, and then the whole world can be reformed.

How can one help the world when one is weak and ignorant? It is like one blind man leading another blind man. Both will fall into a deep abyss. The greatest help or service that can be done in the world is imparting the knowledge of God. Spiritual help is the highest help that can be rendered to mankind. The root cause of human suffering is *avidya* or ignorance. Only if this ignorance is removed can people be eternally happy. That sage who tries to remove ignorance is the highest benefactor of the world. If a person removes the hunger of another by giving food, it is only temporary physical help. The physical need is removed for three hours, then the hunger manifests again and the man remains in the same miserable state. The building of hospitals, rest houses and kitchens for the distribution of free food is not the highest kind of help. Miseries are not eradicated. The world will continue to remain in a miserable state even if one builds many hospitals and hostels.

One should obtain *brahmajnana*, divine knowledge, and distribute this knowledge everywhere in order to remove ignorance in people. Only then will all kinds of miseries, tribulations and evils be completely eradicated. Happiness does not come from wealth. The western nations are quite restless despite their enormous wealth. From this it can be inferred that spiritual life alone can give real, everlasting

peace and happiness. Yoga removes all sorts of pain, misery and tribulation. It gives freedom from the rounds of birth and death with their concomitant evils of disease, old age and other sufferings. It bestows all the divine powers and final liberation through super-intuitional knowledge. The propagation of yogic and spiritual knowledge removes ignorance, eradicates human sufferings and gives eternal happiness. It is the crowning glory of human activities. This is the greatest yajna or yoga. This is jnana yajna, the highest of all yajnas.

How do divine life and God's grace help one to overcome suffering?

Swami Sivananda: Divine life is life in God or the immortal soul. He who leads the divine life attains immortality, perfection, freedom, independence, eternal peace, supreme bliss and perennial joy. He radiates joy, peace and light everywhere. He is free from cares, worries, anxieties, miseries, sufferings and tribulations. He is not troubled. He feels Lord Shiva's grace and mercy at every step. He has perfect unswerving faith in His grace. All difficulties will melt away like mist before the sun.

How can one find true, lasting happiness in life?

Swami Satyananda: To find the path of happiness, one should catch hold of the present without attachment and without a sense of possession. Nothing except the present will come to the rescue, to help. Understand this completely and remember this basic principle: "One who catches hold of the present, attains everything."

4

Health and Disease

DEFINITION OF HEALTH

What is health?

Swami Sivananda: Health is a state wherein the mind and all the organs of the body work in harmony and concord. The person enjoys peace and happiness, performing life's duties with comfort and ease.

What is the yogic concept of health and disease?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga is a science of human health. In yoga, health is not limited to the body, but it includes the overall condition of the body, energy, mind, intellect, emotions and psyche. High blood pressure, diabetes, rheumatism, arthritis, lumbago and such are not the only kinds of diseases. Depression, jealousy, anger, agitation, dissatisfaction, restlessness and inability to concentrate are also diseases. In this broad view of health, the area of therapy is not limited; rather it applies to all aspects of human life.

How does yoga define health?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga sees health not merely as the absence of disease from the body, but more as the ability to manage deficiencies, illnesses and imbalances in the physiological, psychological and spiritual dimensions of human life.

The concept of yogic health is defined in the word *swasthya*. *Swasthya* is derived from the Sanskrit word *swa*, meaning 'self, the personal or individual self', and *stha*, meaning 'to become established in'. Therefore, *swasthya* which has been broadly translated as health, means being aware of the nature which is manifesting at present in the body, personality, behaviour, thoughts and actions. Lack of self-acceptance is the basic cause of disease, whether it be physical or emotional.

What is the approach to health in yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The concept of health in yoga is to realize the natural stamina, strength and ability of the body, mind and emotions. As one comes closer to the natural self, the functioning of the organs improves and there are fewer imbalances in the nervous and hormonal systems or in the emotional structure. Disease can be overcome by correcting such imbalances. This approach is both effective and beneficial for physical health. With regular practice of yoga, people do not become sick so easily. Of course, it is natural to have an upset stomach, diarrhoea or constipation occasionally, but that tends to be the extent of illness in a practitioner of yoga. If the lifestyle is balanced, and one remains at ease with oneself, there is simply no place for disease.

Who is a healthy person?

Swami Sivananda: In a healthy person the three *doshas* or humours of the body: *vata*, wind, *pitta*, bile and *kapha*, phlegm, are in equilibrium. Health is that condition in which the appetite and digestion are good, and the breathing and pulse are normal. There is a good quantity and quality of blood and the nerves are strong. The mind is calm and stable in a sound body. There is free movement of the bowels and normal urine. There are rosy cheeks, a shining face and sparkling eyes. Health is that state in which a person jumps, sings, smiles, laughs, whistles and moves about hither and

thither with joy and ecstasy. In that condition one can think and speak properly and act with clarity, nimbleness and vigilance. Health is the birthright of humanity, not disease.

Why is good health important?

Swami Sivananda: Life without good health is a miserable condition, even if one is the Lord of the whole earth. The state of good health is coveted by all. A life with good health is a great blessing indeed. Good health is needed in order to achieve the four kinds of efforts or *purushartha*: *dharma*, righteousness, *artha*, wealth, *kama*, desires, and *moksha*, liberation. Each *purushartha* follows on from the last: by virtuous deeds wealth is gained and with wealth worldly desires can be gratified. Once these three needs are met, liberation of the self can be attempted. Without good health, these needs of life cannot be progressively fulfilled.

Nishkama karma yoga, selfless service, cannot be performed without good health. One cannot do *asana* and *pranayama* without good health. This body is a boat to cross the ocean of *samsara*, the cycle of births and deaths. It is an instrument for doing virtuous deeds and attaining *moksha*. An aspirant needs to be free from *adhi* and *vyadhi*, diseases of mind and body, if he wants to do *karma yoga* and attain knowledge of the higher self.

The attainment of *atmajnana*, realization of the identity of the *jiva*, the individual soul, and *Brahman*, the supreme soul, alone can put an end to the wheel of birth and death with its concomitant evils of disease, old age, pain, suffering, worries and the various other trials of life. *Atmajnana* alone can give unalloyed eternal bliss, supreme peace, highest knowledge and immortality.

How is good health linked to karma?

Swami Sivananda: A person enjoys good health on account of good *karmas* done in the previous birth. The person who has done meritorious services in his previous incarnation, who has shared what he had with others, who has helped

the poor and the needy, who has done worship, meditation, yogic kriyas and pranayama in his previous birth, enjoys sound health in this birth. The law of causation is unyielding and unrelenting.

CAUSE OF DISEASE

What is the cause of disease?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone is involved in life through connections with family, children, property, job, business, and so on. Whatever happens in the family, business or society has repercussions on the individual. A person's health depends on how such repercussions are received and accepted. Sometimes things are pleasant and sometimes not. Sometimes people bring happiness and sometimes not. Everything has an effect on the mind, and the assimilation of that effect is called karma, which results in suffering and disease.

Migraine, diabetes, high blood pressure, gastritis or slipped disc are really the effects and influences of relationships with one's family, friends, job or profession, which have contributed to these disease states. The cause of disease is found not only in viruses, bacteria or hereditary principles, but also in the way the personality has reacted to favourable and unfavourable situations in life.

For example, a child that was wanted for many years is born and the parents are very happy. But after two years the child dies, and its death leaves an effect on the parents' minds. These effects are not merely psychological; they also penetrate into the physiology and can develop into asthma or even cancer. Medical doctors are consulted for treatment, but they don't understand that the events of life can cause disease. Conditions such as gastritis or peptic ulcer are not necessarily due to physical causes. Many states of disease are due to the 'bacteria' issued by the individual's personality and philosophy.

This may not be the usual way of thinking, but yogis think this way. Many ordinary diseases, including insomnia,

depression, loneliness, and frustration, are actually due to an improper, unscientific, and unyogic relationship with life.

The following analogy helps in understanding the role of unconscious impressions. A movie camera placed outside a building will record everything that happens within its range. At any time a particular frame of the film can be viewed; for example, a photograph of a crime that took place within the range of the camera. The police can use the photograph to catch the criminal. In the same manner, everything the brain perceives throughout a person's life is photographed, significant or insignificant, good or bad. Everything is recorded without exception, and all of this information is stored in the collective unconscious.

Scientists say that atoms bounce back and forth from each and every personality and one ceaselessly acquires impressions in this way. What happens to these impressions? Do they die? Are they lost? If they are lost, how does a person remember them or dream about them? One is able to see, reproduce and re-enact these impressions again, and that is proof that they are not lost. Maybe a few impressions become mingled with other major impressions. Maybe some are more powerful and intense while others may be secondary or insignificant. Yoga, however, says that all of these impressions are indestructible karmas.

In yoga, therefore, the word karma signifies not only action, but also the impressions of life, the impressions gained by the mind from objects through the senses. These impressions assume a shape and may be linked to the spirit, the ego, the psyche or the body. At any given moment, particular impressions are triggered and they surface. One does not know how this happens, but an insignificant experience in childhood or youth may ultimately result in a serious disease. It is clearer if one talks of physical disease, ego disease, psychic disease and spiritual disease.

Spiritual diseases are very obstinate, and there is no system of diagnosis for them. Even psychic diseases are difficult to diagnose. In yoga, the mind is considered to be

an energy force. Just as energy can be spoken of in terms of voltage, amperes or watts, in the same way, the mind is seen as a force or energy. It is very difficult to decide whether an infirmity is mental or physical. In yoga, the problem of disease is considered holistically. If one has a physical disease, yoga says there is a mental cause.

Mental diseases are complicated. Just knowing about them is not enough. If there is fear, it is necessary to discover the cause of the fear, but how? It is difficult to find the cause. If something goes wrong in the family or in the business, a person becomes anxious. When asked why he is anxious, he replies, "My family is not doing well or my business is not doing well." That is all he knows, but this is only the apparent cause. The person who is suffering does not know the real cause of his anxiety, as it is rooted in the karma from his childhood, or maybe from his previous incarnation.

How can anyone know what his karmas are? How can one even know what happened in childhood? When a person was a child in his mother's lap, in his mother's womb, or in a previous incarnation, so much happened. All those things are registered in the mind, and they are the real and deep-rooted cause of the anxiety that is suffered today due to some failure in family and business.

According to the theory of karma, what is the origin of disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: Disease is both *sanchita*, accumulated karma, and *kriyamana*, current or fluid karma. If one decides to live in a heavily polluted place and develops lung cancer, or if one decides to live in a clean place and be healthier, that is *kriyamana* karma; it is a choice. What one is subjecting the body and mind to is *kriyamana* karma. Disease is not destined. It occurs in the process of moving towards death. Transformations, weakening or strengthening of an organ of the body or an area of life, happen continuously.

If one is in bed for a month, the muscles become weak and the circulation is affected. When one tries to stand up,

there is trembling. When one tries to walk, the legs can't support the body, but gradually, with use, they become strong and again support the whole body. Therefore, the body goes through its biorhythms. Ageing is a biorhythm of the body, and disease is a biorhythm of the body.

According to the theory of karma, how is illness categorized?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yogis have recognized that it is impossible to become disease-free. A person who takes birth is subject to *vyadhi*, illness, and old age, *jara*. *Vyadhi* is a natural condition of the body. Illness, disease and disharmony are the natural conditions of the body when it is interacting with the environment, with nature, with society and with the prevailing circumstances. Therefore, being the nature of the body, illness cannot be totally eradicated. Illness has been broadly categorized in three groups: *adhibhautika*, *adhidaivika* and *adhyatmika*.

In the context of health, *adhibhautika* means diseases coming from outside due to external conditions, such as environmental and dietary factors, pollution, viruses and germs. *Bhautika* means the material dimension, the external dimension. In relation to illness and disease, *adhibhautic* means looking at the external environment: the soil, air, water, the elemental causes of problems like pollution.

Adhidaivika is destined ill-health. It can be said to be genetic; it becomes part of the body and of one's destiny from the time of birth. *Daivika* here does not mean divine, but something that human beings have no access or control over. It is beyond the range of human effort. Plague, natural calamity, floods, volcanic activities and earthquakes also become factors which give birth to new illnesses and diseases.

Adhyatmika means something which is coming out of one's own being due to either unconscious psychological frustration or emotional tension. The source is within one's self. *Atmic* means spiritual, *adhi* means stemming from.

Adhyatmika means stemming from the self, karmic, genetic, inherited samskaras, plus the unconscious, psychological imbalances that one experiences.

How does karma manifest as ill health?

Swami Satyananda: There are three important ways in which karma manifests as ill health. The first is when a disciple's illness is taken on by the spiritual master, such as Ramakrishna, Christ and others. In that case it is not their karma. They are without karma, but they take on the karma of their devotees due to compassion.

The second way occurs within a family. Whatever happens in the family affects the other family members. Whatever the wife, husband or children do affects the other family members. Similarly, if something happens to a person's business, job or property, he is affected by it. This may not affect everybody in the family, but it will affect those who take the karmas of the family on themselves. Of course, one does not want to do this but it happens through a spontaneous process of thinking. There is so much cancer and heart disease because family members take on the karma of the person they are attached to. This is the second phase of sickness: it is not necessarily that person's karma, but it is the karma of the family members. The karma of others can be taken on through attachment and identification.

The third way that karma manifests as sickness is through the expression of personal karma. An individual's karma can cause a disease. A person's thought can create a disease, his food can cause a disease. The personal karmas may belong to this life or to a previous life. Medical science says that a disease can be inherited from previous generations. Today a person's DNA can be analyzed and it can be determined when the disease originated, maybe four or five generations back. Even though someone may be living a very good life, the karma of a previous life or a previous generation can create disease in him today.

MANAGING ILL HEALTH

What is the role of disease?

Swami Sivananda: Diseases are karmic purgations. They are guests of this house, this physical body. They are sweet messages from Mother Kali.

What is the purpose of disease?

Swami Satyananda: According to yogic philosophy, disease is a process of elimination of karma. The purpose of disease is not suffering; the purpose is to expel the toxins of karma, just as toxins are expelled by diarrhoea, abscess or fever. When a person is suffering from sickness, he should understand that his karmas are being released. If he thinks properly at that time, the disease will create new wisdom and insight.

Sickness must be gone through as it is the process by which nature expels toxins. If the natural release of these poisons is suppressed, nature will try to push them out by force through a fever, for example. Illness must be treated very systematically. All kinds of sickness should be treated, whether insomnia, schizophrenia or a physical disease. But the treatment should not obstruct the law of nature, as nature is an all powerful and omnipresent force. Nature controls the entire universe by certain laws which are inexorable. Nature is a very organized system with invisible laws. Behind all sickness, there is a karmic law.

Is seeking medical treatment interfering with the expression of one's unalterable prarabdha karma?

Swami Satyananda: Those karmas which are being considered, which are not yet fixed, can still be changed. Medical treatment can come under the category of prarabdha in the making. When someone falls ill, that person stops eating. This can be considered a form of treatment, but it does not interfere with the prarabdha. It interferes with the karma that is not yet fixed; that is the difference. Nothing can interfere with the prarabdha because everything in that area

is already marked, decided and destined. The things come up as they have been written. The small person thinks that he is changing these laws, but he is not.

He should change his present habits and lifestyle, but without interfering with the prarabdha, which is the cause of his suffering. The prarabdha should be allowed to exhaust itself without suppression, then the illness will go away and not return.

When you were ill, why didn't you seek medical treatment?

Swami Satyananda: I stand by my own principles and convictions. Even if I get a bullet in my side, it will remain as it is. I don't mind – I have faith in myself. I have set convictions and I will never go one inch this side or one inch that side, even if the whole ashram is burned down. I have lived by these convictions for years and years together. If my bones had been broken, I would have lived with that condition throughout my life. That was one contention I had with my guru throughout my ashram training. I said, "No doctor should enter my room." I don't like it when somebody talks about a philosophy but does not practise it. When one knows there is some higher power at work, why does one take a different view in practical life?

I have always been true to this conviction, from the very beginning. In 1944 when I had an attack of tuberculosis, my left lung was not functioning, but still I refused to be treated. I was to be sent to a hospital, but I said, "No. I may die, but I will not go to the hospital and get treated." It came to me unconsciously at that time, but now I am conscious. Due to my condition I had to leave the ashram for some time, so I went to Rishikesh. It was a hopeless place as far as food, shelter and atmosphere were concerned. I ate rough rotis, half baked and half unbaked. Every day I would eat eighteen to twenty double-size rotis with ten to fifteen green chillies. I think it was the green chillies that saved my life. If anything at all could have interfered with my karmas, it was the green chillies. In three months I was all right.

Normally, if one goes to a sanatorium, it takes two years to recover from tuberculosis. I decided I would not go to a sanatorium, even if I had a little money. I said to myself, “I will not take any medicine, and as long as I am alive, I will just eat whatever I can get.”

If somebody breaks a leg, isn't it better to put it in a plaster cast and let it mend rather than becoming an invalid?

Swami Satyananda: I can understand this viewpoint, but others will never understand mine. With this viewpoint, suffering will continue lifelong, but with my viewpoint, suffering will never be nearby. It cannot come, as prarabdha karma is afraid of a person who wants it. However, if a person dislikes a particular karma, it will come with greater force. If a person is afraid of illness, it will strike much sooner. If one tries to avoid the prarabdha karma, it will come with redoubled force. That is the law of karma.

If physical suffering is due to past karma and serves a purpose, why should one alleviate it at all?

Swami Niranjanananda: Lord Buddha used to say that the entire world is suffering, and nirvana is liberation from that suffering. Certain theories say that suffering is a reflection of past actions. Nobody disputes that. But if one analyzes one's situation in life according to the concept of evolution and growth, it can be seen that suffering is the instrument by which one evolves. It is the catalyst for evolution. If there were no suffering, there would be no search for health and peace. If there were no disease, there would be no medicine. In the normal evolutionary process, suffering becomes the catalyst for growth and change and, therefore, it becomes a natural law.

If suffering in this life is due to one's prarabdha karma or past karmas, and one wants to purify it, why worry about the suffering? There are, however, only a few people with that mentality. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was one such person. He said, “I have throat cancer and I can ask the Mother to

help me, but I won't." There was an acceptance of suffering. He said, "No, I am not going to do anything about it, as I know that it is my karma." Only a few people can have that approach and suffer the pain with happiness.

Humans are weak individuals, always in search of a state of comfort. In the search for comfort, pain and suffering are avoided. As long as the mind is weak, an effort should be made to overcome the suffering, as mental weakness will enhance and increase the potency of the suffering. The effort one is making to improve and alleviate the suffering is more mental than physical. When an effort is made to overcome suffering, one is dealing with the mind and managing the fear. Once fear goes away, disease will run its course, without increasing or intensifying.

Yoga helps people to reorganize and rebalance their system. Once that is done, disease will run its natural course and be eliminated fast.

As the fulfilment of karma is necessary for spiritual evolution, should one undergo an organ transplant in order to overcome a diseased condition, or would this interfere with the process of karma?

Swami Satyananda: If a person requires an organ transplant, why not do it? It would be better to live on and practise yoga in this life rather than wait for the next life. The full span of human life is one hundred years. Every machine has a warranty period of one year, five years or ten years. This body can live for one hundred years, if a person looks after it well. Therefore, transplanting the heart or another organ is not against the injunctions of yoga, but one must make a sankalpa to live an absolutely spiritual life.

Would the donation of an organ interfere with the karma of the recipient?

Swami Satyananda: The karma of the recipient is to receive the organ and the karma of the donor is to give it. Destiny is not so rigid that donating an organ means interference with

karma. Let me make it clearer. A man was blind and he died. During his lifetime he remained blind because the scientists and medical doctors had not discovered how to work with that particular law of nature by which he could see again. But once that law of nature is understood and it becomes possible to have a cornea transplanted from one person to another, the blind man can be made to see. The laws of destiny, therefore, are not that rigid.

The person who donates the organ has not destroyed the logical formation or process of destiny. He has added a new dimension to a man's life. He has added an amendment to the rigidity of destiny. Maybe in a few years time it will be possible to keep a man alive for two thousand years! This is not playing with destiny or the law of nature it is working within the framework of nature. Nature is a process where there is a lot of potential and possibility, but there is no intelligence in nature. Nature or prakriti is a law, a system, with no individual intelligence. Purusha is intelligent – that is the point.

Nature keeps on moving, therefore, just as it always has, unless somebody reveals a new law, as the scientists have been doing in many ways. They have discovered and understood many of the laws of nature, and by doing so they have altered the rigidity of destiny. Man can live for two thousand years – it is possible. The physical body can become immortal. This may not be wished for, but it is possible.

Is the donation of organs accepted in the East?

Swami Niranjanananda: If it is certain that someone is dead, their organs can definitely be donated. When an old car is taken to the dump, the reusable parts are removed. The unusable parts are crushed together, packed and sent for recycling. Similarly, if other people can be helped with the same parts one has used, there is no harm in giving them, provided the parts are in good working order. If one is in good health and the body mechanics are in full working order, donation of organs, *ang daan*, is considered to be the

greatest form of charity. Ang daan is the gift of a physical body part and it is also accepted in eastern thought.

How should a karma yogi look after the health of the physical body?

Swami Sivananda: A karma yogi should have a sound, healthy and strong physical body. How can an aspirant serve others if he has a poor physique? Regular practice of asanas and pranayama, physical exercise and nourishing food taken at regular mealtimes are necessary to keep up a high standard of health. The karma yogi should take great care of the body, but should not have the least *moha* or attachment to it. The karma yogi should never think of this body as ‘mine’, for even jackals and fish will claim, “this body is mine”. The karma yogi should be ever ready to sacrifice his body for a noble cause. He should bear the pain of disease and have the power of endurance. Only such a person can become a good karma yogi and do real and useful service to the country and to suffering humanity.

What are the three conditions of life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Satyananda has always said that a human being is a composition of the three qualities of head, heart and hands. Head represents intellect, knowledge and wisdom, heart represents the emotions and deeper feelings, and hands represent *purushartha* or action. These are the prime ingredients of life. The absence of one makes life miserable, whereas harmony of the three will lead one to experience life in its full glory and potential. That is the basic philosophy of yoga.

If the components of life are analyzed and observed objectively, it will be discovered that one has a body, through which sickness and wellbeing, disease and health are experienced, which is the *prarabdha* or destined karma of the body. It has also been stated in the scriptures that when one comes into this life, three stages must be undergone: disease, *vyadhi*, old age, *jara*, and death, *mrityu*. Sickness and health

come in sequence and are the prarabdha or destiny of the body.

This has been understood by professionals, intellectuals, and scientists throughout the world. They have come to realize that the attainment of health is not necessarily the absence of disease, but harmony of the various aspects of the human nature and personality.

Everyone has to pass through the three conditions of disease, old age and death, which can alter the mind frame. Vyadhi is disease, illness, pain, suffering, conflict, imbalance, stress and anxiety. No one can avoid it. Even saints cannot avoid it. Only their perception of vyadhi has changed, so that they are not affected by it, whereas others are affected by it. Vyadhi is an integral part of this life. Nobody is perfectly healthy. There is some imbalance somewhere in the human personality, whether it is in the body in the form of arthritis, rheumatism, asthma or diabetes, or something in the mind in the form of being unable to manage mental problems, frustrations and anxieties. There is karmic, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual disease. Can anyone hope to attain absolute and total health?

Jara, the second condition, is old age and infirmity, and mrityu, the third condition, is death. Can anyone stop themselves from ageing and dying? No, these are the conditions that everyone has to face in life.

It is a scientific fact that there is no stability in continuity. Evolution is continuity, which is universal and individual. No one can be perfect in life. The moment one defines perfection, it creates a limit to the concept of perfection. Perfection represents the concept of an evolved nature, of an evolved and sublimated human personality. Yoga says that life is continuity and, by realizing this, one should accept life as it comes.

Humans, however, have a particular tendency; they are unable to accept life as it comes. They tend to live in the past and in memories of past events; they tend to become fearful of the future and to ignore the present. Yoga philosophy says,

let bygones be bygones, the past is past. It cannot be altered or changed, but wisdom can be derived from the experiences of the past. Be in the present, try to be harmonized in the present. The moment the present can be managed properly, the future becomes a beautiful, evolving, unfolding experience of human nature.

SPIRITUAL HEALING

Why should one undergo sickness when it could be removed through psychic healing or other siddhis?

Swami Satyananda: Karmas must be undergone in order to evolve. Sickness is a process of evolution within the body and mind. Here is a story to illustrate this. Once Ramdas had a very high fever. He had a consultation with Shivaji on that day, which was of utmost importance, so he transferred the fever to his tiger skin. When Shivaji came he met with Ramdas and as he was leaving he noticed that the tiger skin was shivering. Ramdas said, "Lord Shivaji, don't worry, it is my fever. I transferred it there for the time being in order to meet you." Shivaji replied, "But if you can transfer a fever from your body to the tiger skin, why don't you just throw it away?" Ramdas said, "I must suffer, I must undergo the karma."

Why is giving spiritual healing not advised?

Swami Satyananda: When trying to heal a sick person, it must be understood why he is sick. There is a chain of action and reaction, equal and opposite. That is the first law of science and the first law of life. In healing someone, the first priority is to see that the karmic process of that individual is corrected and reorganized. If this is not done, and only the disease symptoms are removed, there will be sickness after sickness.

Spiritual healers often become terribly sick. This has been the experience of most spiritual healers in the West. Many spiritual healers have chronic and incurable diseases

that medical science, acupuncture and homeopathy fail to cure. However, one asana can make them all right in a day, because it is the karma that is actually affecting them.

Many spiritual healers encounter another difficulty: when they accept a patient, they take on the same disease the patient has. For example, a person is suffering from rheumatism and the healer treats him. The patient may improve, but in the end the healer has the rheumatism. The healer doesn't understand how he has taken on the illness of his patient, because he doesn't know the laws of nature. Few people know these laws.

Spiritual healing is a good science and sometimes it helps people, but the healers should know that it is not the ultimate healing of human suffering. It provides relief at the time of agony, but ultimately the karma must be changed. The whole structure and organization of the body, mind and spirit must be transformed.

Why shouldn't siddhis be used to help suffering people?

Swami Satyananda: Siddhis are the offshoots of a concentrated mind. By every standard they are something wonderful. But who is to decide that a person should be helped, when one does not know his karma? His suffering may be an inevitable consequence of his karma, and he needs to suffer to expel the karmic dung. The use of siddhis to remove a person's suffering may delay his evolution. Therefore, unless one has a penetrating insight into the law of karma, siddhis should not be used to help anyone.

Suppose a man is constipated: he goes to the doctor, who gives him a prescription. The man takes the prescription, purchases the pills, takes them and goes to sleep. The next morning he seems all right, so he goes to his office. After five days he feels unwell at work. He faints and his blood pressure goes up. Fortunately, his boss is a yogi and asks, "What happened to you?" The man answers, "I have fever and a headache and for the last fifteen days I have had no bowel movements." The boss understands the cause of the

problem, so he gives the man a few glasses of warm saline water. The man has a clearance. In four days he is cured and the cure lasts for a long time.

This story illustrates how sufferings arise on account of hidden factors called karma. If I want to help a person, I first see that he goes the right way, that his mental and emotional personality are properly stabilized and his physical habits are improved. If he agrees to do that, I will help him through clairvoyance or clairaudience, otherwise not. The use of siddhis must be disciplined and controlled. For this reason a person who practises sincere, earnest yoga must have a guru. Just as every car must have a driver, every disciple must have a guru. Although the ultimate guru may be the inner guru, still an outer guru whose language can be understood is needed, because he says, “Hey! Don’t do it.”

Did you ever use siddhis to heal others?

Swami Satyananda: When I was practising yoga and living with my guru, Swami Sivananda, in Rishikesh, I became proud because I developed the healing touch due to my mantra practice. My guru was definitely much greater than me, but I became very egoistic. When sick people went to him, he dealt with them in a special way. When the unfortunate souls narrated their maladies, he used to say, “I will pray to God that you will be all right.” But when they came to me, I used to say, “Okay, sit down here and you will be all right.”

A time came when I thought I had perhaps developed greater achievements than my guru, but what happened one day brought good sense to me. I healed a witch and when I healed her, her disease came to me. I tried everything to cure it, but nothing worked: antibiotics, ayurveda, homeopathy, naturopathy all failed. Every time I treated myself, the disease grew wilder and I never knew what was happening to me. The witch was healed, but I had taken her karma upon myself.

When the suffering grew intense, I had no choice but to bring my condition to the notice of my guru. I went to him

and said, “I am completely overcome. I am not able to work. My energies are depleted.” He smiled at me and said, “Don’t use siddhis and don’t pose as a healer.”

He explained, “If somebody comes to you for healing, tell him to practise yoga. Ask him to change his diet, habits and temperament, to change his social and emotional relationships, or to reform his body, mind and emotions. Then you will be serving the cause of God. Siddhis are like prostitutes and you are living with them. God has all the siddhis. He could make everybody all right in one day; he could take away all disease, but everybody is suffering. Why is that? Everyone must work out the process of evolution. By using siddhis, you are destroying the drama of God. He has a purpose behind the variety of events in creation and you should understand that greater scheme.”

What responsibility does one have towards one’s fellow men and women? What is real help? When should one interfere in other people’s karma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Firstly, one has both no responsibility and a lot of responsibility towards one’s fellow men and women. There is no responsibility in the sense that one has one’s own life to lead and others have their lives to lead. No one should interfere in the life of another individual. One should just concentrate on one’s own development and evolution, and once a certain stage of mental and psychic evolution is reached, the desire to help others and a method of helping them will automatically manifest. One does not have to try. At that stage, when asking what responsibility one has towards others, the answer will be that one has many responsibilities.

Every individual shares the basic qualities of humanity, and the growth, understanding and creative utility of these basic personality traits must be encouraged. This understanding will come after one has evolved through the first stage. But first the individual should ask himself where he stands in life, what his limitations and abilities are, and

learn how to recognize the manifestations of his personality, mind and so on. Only then can he try to help others. Unless realization of one's qualities takes place, unless one knows how to work, one cannot tell others how to work. Unless one knows a system, process or method, one cannot impart a system to others. Therefore, first individual consciousness has to evolve and then universal consciousness. Both answers are therefore applicable.

Secondly, what is real help? There are different concepts of 'help'. It is understood one way in a social context and another in a personal context. The spiritual context is different again. Individual help is according to one's capacity to encourage and assist people to manage their lives, in terms of moral and emotional support, and trying to find a solution to the problem. In the social context, help can come in the form of assisting communities, groups or businesses to become self-sufficient, to stand on their own two feet. Maybe some kind of charity will be required.

Help takes on a different meaning according to the areas of life and individuals involved. It must always be remembered that everybody has limitations. No one should over-extend themselves, because the moment they do, problems will arise and they will fail. One should learn how to express oneself in a qualitatively better way, according to one's own capacity. If even five percent of this aspect of human creativity can be generated, that is more than enough to help practically the whole of humanity.

The problem is that people are not creative, but self-centred. They try to satisfy their own ego, and where the ego is involved, creativity cannot take place. The spiritual concepts of self-observation and self-abstinence are involved and the principles of *yama*, rules of conduct, and *niyama*, rules of personal discipline, must be followed.

Thirdly, it is not possible to interfere with anyone's karma. No one can interfere with their karma, so how can they interfere with somebody else's? Only the masters or gurus have that ability. Therefore, do not worry about

interfering with somebody else's karma, as that possibility does not even exist.

How is it possible for a person to take on another person's karma?

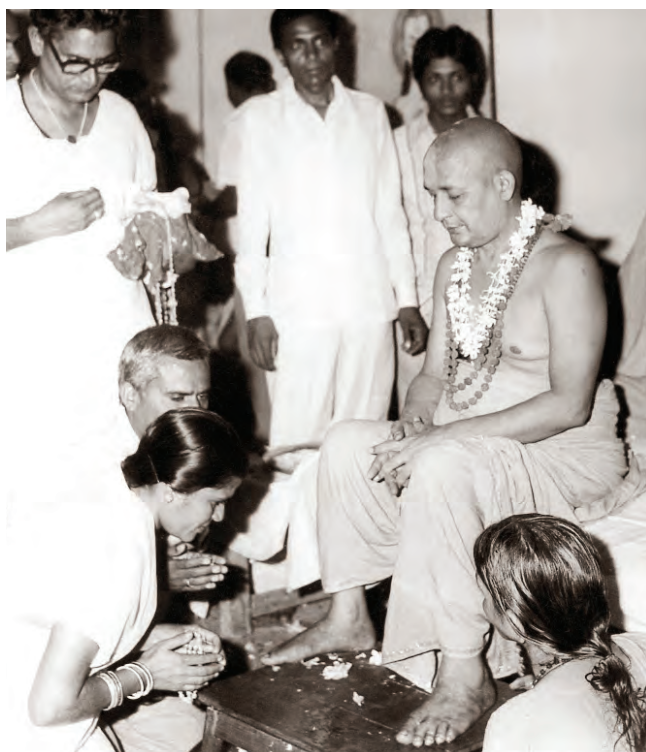
Swami Satyananda: Transference of karma takes place if there is a deep communication or psychic link between two people. The depth of awareness is responsible. It is an automatic process if a person loves somebody greatly, whether friend, husband, wife, child or lover. One can even take on the karma of an enemy if one is constantly aware of him. In the guru-disciple relationship, if the two are unified in spirit and consciousness, the karmas of the disciple are automatically transferred to the guru, and the knowledge of the guru is also automatically transmitted to the disciple. But if the guru and disciple are not unified in consciousness, this does not happen.

In India, there are many sadhus and mahatmas who take on other people's karma. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and also Adi Shankaracharya are some examples. There is a long list of such saints who have taken the karma of others in order to free them. In this case, the disciple would become free of his karma, be it illness or something else. Powerful souls are able to take upon themselves some of the karmas of their disciples at will. Saints like Swami Sivananda and Ramana Maharshi were able to take on the karmas of their disciples. But they can only take on the *kriyamana* or current karmas and the *sanchita* or accumulated karmas. Those karmas are still being processed and are not yet in the form of vibrations.

The proof for the transference of karma is purely individual, and it is difficult to ascertain in most cases. For example, a lady is suffering and the moment she touches the left foot of a man, she becomes all right and he starts suffering. That is the proof. He receives the disease, but the lady will continue to suffer for some time, depending on her development. If she is spiritually advanced and has decided

to change her behaviour, there would be the possibility of complete elimination of the karma, but if she continues in the same way, she is bound to suffer again due to other karmas. As far as the man is concerned, he has received the disease, but he will not suffer it, as his state of mind is different. If the mind does not suffer, the body also does not suffer.

If an unqualified person interferes with the karmas of another, he will take those karmas on himself and, at the same time, make the other person suffer the same karmas equally. The karmas are split into two. It is something like two people committing murder – both receive capital punishment. Therefore, every person should face the consequences of his own actions. Let the joy be his and also the sorrow.



5

Destiny and Free Will

ASTROLOGY

Can one's destiny be known?

Swami Satyananda: Destiny exists on many levels: physical, mental, astral, and also on higher levels, but one cannot know this destiny without asking someone else. It is necessary to be guided, so a person should go to an expert in the science, who will guide him. I personally never wanted such guidance. I thought that even if I became a victim of my own destiny, I did not want any astrologer to come to my aid.

Can destined events be prevented?

Swami Satyananda: This is beyond everyone. Even the master of destiny, who has created it, cannot change it. When the prarabdha karma is completely formed, the experiences are absolutely set. No one can stop it, regardless of the stature of the person. Everyone has their fixed quota of happiness and sorrow. This is the truth and I have experienced it. This has also been said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Ayodhyakanda, doha 77):

*Considering an individual's good and bad actions,
The Lord weighs the cause and sanctions the result.
The result is the outcome of the action in totality,
The scriptures, justice and everything confirm it.*

I had a friend who was a forest officer. One day he went to an astrologer, who looked up his son's chart in the *Bhrigu Samhita* and found that it predicted his early death. My friend came to me and I told him that everything happens first in time and then in space. This incident had already happened in time and now all that remained was for it to happen in space. When the time arrived for this incident to happen in space, sure enough, the car in which the son was travelling with his wife overturned and both of them were killed. The father knew of this prediction beforehand and so did I, but he still asked me how that incident was possible. I told him that when something has to happen, it first occurs in eternity, then in time and last in space. Nothing happens all of a sudden. However, there is no need to worry while performing one's worldly duties, as every success has the name of the entitled person written on it, and that person will definitely reap that success.

How do astrological positions influence one's destiny, and is there any yogic practice which can alter this?

Swami Satyananda: Astrology is a science which is both microcosmic and macrocosmic. The macrocosm is the extended universe in which there are planets and stars that orbit and interact with one another. In the microcosm every organism down to the minutest atom is exactly proportionate to the macrocosm. If there is a sun outside, there is a sun within an atom. If there are planets revolving around the sun, there are particles that revolve around the atom; the process of everything is the same. There is a universe outside and a universe inside and they are duplicates of one another. They are not different, even by the smallest fraction. This body is a microcosmic universe, a microcosmic miniature.

Vedantic philosophy states that the replica of the absolute, the eternal, God, Allah, Brahman or atman is present everywhere, in each and every speck of creation. There is no field, no thought, no place in this universe as

far as it extends, where that substance, that central element is not present. This cannot be understood by logic; it can only be understood through deeper experiences. Modern science is coming very close to this realization, but vedantic philosophy has been talking about it for a long time.

Scientists have discovered the moon, Mars, Saturn, Venus and many other heavenly bodies. They have made certain statements regarding their fixed orbits and movements. When Galileo said the earth rotates but the sun does not, the authorities of his country thought he was a heretic. He accepted their accusations and surrendered before the court because he did not want to face the Inquisition. But the moment he came out of the court, he kicked the ground three times and said, "The earth moves." This fact was known in India long before Galileo's time. They never believed that the sun revolves; they realized that the planets rotate around the sun.

There were no telescopes in India at that time, so how did they know this? They knew because they explored the heavenly bodies within themselves. If a person can adjust his vision in meditation, he can see the movement of the planets inside his body. He can see this heavenly drama unfold within as though his body were a planetarium. Through the practices of yoga, one can have the vision of the whole planetary system within oneself. The planetary positions, which are shown in the horoscope, can also be seen in the same order in the physical body. The external planetary positions are in absolute correspondence with the planetary positions within the physical body.

This means that the moon, sun, Venus, and Jupiter, which are outside in the galaxy, are also found inside the body in the same corresponding positions. The time of birth, when the head emerges and the first breath enters the nose, is the instant that determines the planetary position of one's life. This moment of disconnection and connection is considered to be the *muhurta*, and the astrological chart is cast according to that moment.

Physical, mental, and emotional conditions, successes and failures, profession, business and education, love affairs and marital affairs are dependent upon the movement of the macrocosmic universe and its influence on the microcosmic universe within.

Among the practices of yoga, the power of mantra is great. Although the mantra is a simple word, it is the *shakti* of *nada*, the force of sound. When this sound is repeated hundreds and thousands of times with concentration of mind, it starts to vibrate from the same point where one was born twenty, thirty or forty years ago. At that time the entire relationship between the planetary positions in one's life changes. Accordingly, the destiny or events to come are mended and in certain cases changed.

In yoga, the mantra is selected on the basis of the zodiac sign. The mantras belong to frequencies related to particular astrological or heavenly positions within the body. In this way, one's entire destiny can be changed by the practice of mantra yoga.

Does the date of initiation into sannyasa have an influence on destiny?

Swami Niranjanananda: When a person is initiated into sannyasa, it means that he has left behind his previous worldly ties and taken a new birth in this very life. Therefore, it is a tradition with sannyasins to use the date of sannyasa initiation when making their horoscope and astrological charts. They use the date of sannyasa as their spiritual birth date, as a change in the usual pattern of consciousness takes place with that initiation. A new identity develops with the idea: "I am a sannyasin; I am following a spiritual path, a spiritual tradition, and I am striving to make myself better." This attitude eventually moulds the life of a sannyasin and changes his destiny.

In the case of sannyasins, saints and highly evolved souls, the horoscope that is made according to the initiation date is more correct than the actual birth date, for initiation is a

more internal process than an external one. A person who takes sannyasa has the wish to leave behind all the previous attachments and ways of thinking and living, and to mould his personality into that of a sannyasin. If he takes sannyasa for one or two years and then resumes life in the world, it will not make much difference. But if he follows the disciplines of a sannyasin for the rest of his life, it will make a very big difference in the formation of his personality and the patterns of his consciousness, and will definitely alter his karma and destiny.

How have the predictions in your astrological chart come true and how have they been influenced by your willpower and grace?

Swami Satyananda: When I was born, my family members had my astrological chart made. All the bad stars were in the forefront of that chart. The astrologer predicted, “This boy will be a loafer and a vagabond.” I did become a loafer, but in Sanskrit, this is called *parivrajaka*, wandering mendicant.

He also said I would be poor, and so I am, even today. But from the time I was with my guru up to this day, I have helped the institution with millions of pounds and dollars. I also support many institutions in other places, although I do not have a bank account of my own. I remained poor as predicted, but I have overseen cheques worth thousands and millions being signed and changing hands, just as a policeman watches the morning traffic. I just changed the connotation of the word ‘poor’ a little. Instead of penniless, I became a *tyagi*, a renunciate.

He also predicted, “This boy will be the destroyer of the family.” I did destroy the family line by remaining unmarried. As I have no children, who will perform my last rites? The family line has ended, but what kind of an end is that? Now I have many sons and daughters. I just sit here and my sons and daughters run the show, carry out all the ashram programs, run the kitchen and keep the accounts.

When my horoscope was cast, it predicted everything bad about me, and the man who cast it knew what he was doing. It predicted that I would remain sick throughout my life. I do not have any experience of constipation, but I think about disease twenty-four hours of the day. When I close my eyes, I hear sick people talking to me. When I think, thoughts always come about suffering, physical, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual suffering! When I talk to people, they tell me about their suffering. Whenever I communicate, I only hear about suffering.

In this way all the predictions were made, but everything changed when I became a swami. The horoscope did not indicate that I would renounce, although the predictions were basically correct. The horoscope indicates the quality of a person's existence, but the determining factor is not indicated in the horoscope. It rests purely with a person's willpower, and once a person renounces his kith and kin, hearth and home, he definitely has willpower. Without strong willpower it is very difficult to think of renunciation, much less maintain it. I met a guru who influenced the direction of my life, although the astrologer gave no clue about this. Guru's grace came down upon me. The astrologer had no inkling of this event and could not read this aspect of my life in my chart.

A horoscope does not determine a person's destiny – it is only a map! There is something else which determines a person's destiny: his own willpower and enlightenment. I am not a thorough scholar in astrology, but I consider it to be a science. Whatever a person may be, he is all right. He just has to put himself to such use that he will become contented and happy. If I were to die today, I would have no regrets. I would die a happy man.

How much influence do the planets have on one's life, and how much of a person's destiny is in his own hands?

Swami Niranjanananda: A person makes his destiny and destroys himself through his own ignorance. If somebody

is walking the path of righteousness, there is no power in the world that can change his destiny. If a person decides to do something from the bottom of his heart and keeps going, despite every difficulty that comes in the way, he will succeed. But if that determination, or *sankalpa shakti*, is not there, after two slaps he will say, "Oh, my stars are responsible for that." Astrology definitely has an influence, but it fails when confronted by the force of the human mind and nature. In his ignorance a person tries to put the blame for his own inability on someone else, or if not, on the stars. The planets do reflect on one's life, but the human mind is a more powerful influence than any star.

Can destiny be transcended?

Swami Satyananda: Each and every being in this world, including those of the mineral and vegetable kingdoms, is moving in accordance with the definite predetermined laws of nature. As long as a person is weak and incompetent mentally and physically, he is also subject to the laws of destiny. But as he develops greater awareness, he gradually transcends the dictates of destiny and karma and is able to create a new law and order for himself. The moment a person starts to cross barrier after barrier, boundary after boundary of his consciousness, destiny cannot trouble him, although it will keep him bound in some way or another until he becomes a *jivanmukta*, or liberated being.

Anybody can change his own destiny by transcending a certain level of consciousness. The future is changed by the human mind, the human psychic state, but not all can do it. For those who cannot, the astrological predictions hold true. When one is weak-minded, he has to flow with the current of life. But once he gains strength by concentration of mind and resolute willpower, he can definitely shape his destiny and change the course of events. Mankind has done this and will continue to reshape his own destiny.

DESTINY

What is the aim of destiny?

Swami Sivananda: Destiny is man's own creation. His final destiny, however, is the realization of the immortal through this mortal frame.

How is destiny created?

Swami Satyananda: Destiny is based on the law of action and reaction. Every action, every karma, has a reaction. Just as a pebble thrown into a lake creates ripples, in the same way, karma creates ripples in the cosmos. Karma is not only a physical action; a thought or feeling is also karma. The word karma means 'movement'. Wherever there is mobility, there is karma. Each action creates a reaction, and the reaction makes another reaction. In the course of time, this chain reaction is multiplied into million-fold reactionary forces in life, and that creates destiny.

What is destiny?

Swami Satyananda: Destiny is a part of the evolutionary plan. It is the outcome of the constant accumulation of karma. If one sees a fruit or a flower, one must presuppose that they come from a tree or a plant. The fruit and flower are the destiny of the tree. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (2:9:4):

*Siddhasya paurusheneha phalasya phalashaalinaa;
Shubhaashubhaarthasampattirdaivashabdena kathyate.*

The good and bad results which proceed from the accomplished acts are expressed by the word destiny.

Yogis believe in destiny, the chain of action and reaction. Every karma has to be paid for, and one cannot get out of it. In yoga and tantra, this is known as prarabdha karma. Prarabdha is the fructification of the totality of the karmas from life in previous incarnations. Adi Shankaracharya says in *Aparokshanubhuti* (v. 92):

Karma janmaantarakritam praarabdhamiti keertitam.

The actions of the previous births are known as prarabdha.

Destiny is derived not only from previous incarnations, but also from the karmas of the parents and previous generations. A person is also responsible for the karmas of the society in which he lives. There are three sources of destiny:

1. Karmas of previous incarnations that come with a person's individual consciousness;
2. Karmas of parents and previous generations, which have come with the mind;
3. Karmas belonging to the society in which a person is living.

One has to enjoy and suffer the karmas of all these three sources. There is no doubt that destiny is a complete and logical science. Destiny is the law of nature and one can't ignore it.

Is there a difference between aims in life and destiny?

Swami Satyananda: Yes, there is a difference between aim and destiny. Suppose I want to be a great scholar, a rich man or a person who has a lot of fun in life. These are all aims, and an aim has a limit. For example, when a person who wants to be a lawyer becomes a lawyer, his aim is fulfilled. After achieving this aim, he may want to be a lawyer in the High Court, then in the Supreme Court, and finally to become a judge. In this way, aims go on changing. To become a lawyer is not one's destiny; destiny is one's intimate relationship with the events in life.

There is an aim which one creates for oneself, and there is also a destiny which is common to everyone. One makes an aim for oneself due to one's expectations, desires or personality, but one does not make a destiny. My aim may be to have a rose garden so that I can grow beautiful flowers and sell them, or make a nice bouquet and present it to somebody. But that is not my destiny.

Destiny means the ultimate process of nature, concerning oneself and all others. When living in society, one has certain aims related to one's social system, accomplishments, knowledge, friendships and family members. There is also an inner relationship, however, between oneself and the happenings of life; this is called destiny.

What does destiny determine in one's life?

Swami Satyananda: Destiny concerns certain matters such as life and death, good and bad reputation, disease and health, suffering and enjoyment. These eight things are under the control of destiny and everything else is beyond its control. Sri Rama says in the *Ramayana* (Ayodhyakanda, 22:22):

*Sukhadukhe bhayakrodhau laabhaalaabhau bhavaabhavau;
Yasya kinchit tathaabhootam nanu daivasya karma tat.*

Joy and sorrow, fear and anger, gain and loss, birth and death, and whatever similar experience comes to a particular individual, that is unquestionably the work of providence.

Everyone is bound by their destiny, and this can be seen everywhere. I am different from you, and you are different from others. Nobody is alike; that is destiny. Every object in this creation has its own nature. Every flute has its own nature. Every mineral has its own distinct nature. That nature is its destiny. In fact, the entire universe is under the law of destiny. Destiny relates not merely to the body or to happiness and unhappiness. Everything in this universe has a destiny somewhere.

What is the relationship between man and destiny?

Swami Niranjanananda: Destiny is a sequence of events over which an individual has no control and no power, just as there is no control over the decay of the body from birth to old age. It happens not sporadically but continuously. It is an everyday event, yet one is unable to stop it from happening.

It is an inevitable sequence of events which shapes the physical body, affects the intelligence and maturity and decides one's nature or *swabhava*. Destiny decides which guna is predominant. It decides how far an individual is going to travel in life. It is the controlling factor of life. Human beings do not control or create destiny.

The ruler of destiny, the lord of destiny, is someone with whom one has the closest relationship. One does not have that kind of relationship with any other being. That lord of destiny controls the body, the function and performance of the various bodily organs, the nature, the gunas, the karmas, the evolution, the samskaras, the maturity of the mind and emotions. Even the process of enlightenment is subject to the control of the lord of destiny.

In other stages of its expression, this lord of destiny is recognized as some other power. It can be recognized as spiritual power or as a social transformative power. It is a force that guides each and everybody's life from birth to death and possibly even beyond. It is not limited to this dimension, to this space, to this time. That power exists in infinity. Infinity has a destiny, just as finite beings have a destiny.

Whether it is called *swabhava*, nature, *prakriti*, spiritual *shakti*, or the masculine and feminine aspects of the transcendental nature, what determines the role of every individual in creation is destiny.

The intimate relationship with the lord of destiny is a subtle and intricate link, like two strands of string which entwine and become string. They are life and existence after death. Existence in life and existence in death is the link with the lord of destiny.

Can destiny that is already formed be changed before it manifests?

Swami Satyananda: Destiny is *adrishta*, which means 'unseen processes'. It is not in the form of mental or thought vibration. It is subtler than vision and emanates from the

unconscious, not the subconscious. Once it emerges from the unconscious, it goes straight up to the conscious mind and manifests in the behaviour. It does not give one any time to change it. Much of what is in the subconscious can be changed, but as soon as it goes down to the unconscious, it is beyond one's jurisdiction.

Some seers can see the subconscious mind and the samskaras going down into the unconscious. Therefore, they understand the events to come, and if they want to interfere at all, they only interfere with those karmas or samskaras which are going towards the unconscious. They are alert, but the karma which is in the unconscious, in the formed state, cannot be exploded out – it is not possible. Karma can only be exploded directly to the conscious state, which one is in now.

How should destiny be faced, whether it is positive or negative?

Swami Satyananda: Ramana Maharshi wrote to his mother after he left home: “The Creator makes each person play his role in life according to his karma. That which is not destined will not happen despite every effort. What is destined is bound to happen; this is certain. Therefore, the best course is to remain silent.”

Destiny fulfils itself in the conscious state in this life, and if one suffers it silently, the karmas are exhausted. When one does not suffer destiny calmly, silently, with dignity and self-respect, and with the strength at hand, new karma is formed. That karma is brought down to the subconscious plane, where it remains in the upper, middle or bottom region, according to its gravity. The heavier it is, the quicker it will sink into the unconscious. There it will become prarabdha, and again it will be shot forth to be experienced again.

Destiny cannot be changed, so it must be accepted, whether good or bad. If one's destiny is positive, it should be faced with humility and prayers. If it is negative, it should be faced with forbearance and accepted as the will of God. That will reduce the strength of the samskaras. Destiny is

unavoidable and everybody has to face it, whether saints or sinners, householders or sannyasins. Birth is destiny, life is destiny, death is destiny and rebirth is also destiny. No one can get out of this cycle, but everyone can maintain the attitude of *viveka* and *jnana*, understanding and knowledge.

Negative and positive destinies come and go, like day and night. Negative destiny causes *dukha*, pain, and positive destiny causes *sukha*, pleasure. When pleasure comes, one is puffed up, intoxicated, and thinks this experience will never end. One does not realize that positive destiny is subject to change. During the periods of positive destiny one should be humble in attitude. One should also be sensitive during these periods, as the day will pass and the night will come. Throughout the periods of *sukha*, one should live as though one were in *dukha*; only then can one face the negative destiny.

However, things usually happen differently. During negative destiny, or *dukha*, one is broken completely. One curses God, humanity, nature and oneself. One cries out, "Why has God punished me? What did I do to deserve this? Why is God so cruel?" And one always prays, "God, please put an end to this ordeal; I can't take any more." When one has a positive destiny, God is not in the picture. The person becomes proud and says, "Yes, I built up this business through hard work, skill and good judgement. I built this beautiful house with my own hands." God is always in the picture during the times of *dukha*, but He is never present during *sukha*. Whenever a person passes into a phase of *sukha*, he is immediately changed. Within a few days he begins to talk differently; the voice is lighter, the thoughts become positive and the conversation is cheerful. He completely forgets that he had a dark night.

Be very careful, therefore, to maintain the correct attitude towards destiny in order to deal with the *karma*, *samskaras* and *vasanas*. *Prarabdha karma* is afraid of a man who wants it, but it comes again with redoubled force to someone who dislikes it or is afraid of it. That is the law of *karma*. Destiny

must come to pass; no one has a way out of it. For that one has to change one's philosophy and nature.

Once born in the human body, destiny has to be faced, but with a difference. A person with a wise philosophy will face destiny with wisdom. A foolish or ignorant person, however, undergoes destiny with pain, weeping and heartbreak. A *jnani*, or person of knowledge, faces his destiny with cheerfulness. He does not grieve and ruin his health, he just faces it. Adi Shankaracharya said in *Aparokshanubhuti* (v. 89):

Praarabdham akhilam bhunjan nodvegam kartumarhasi.

While experiencing the fruit of past actions, one need not be anxious about anything.

When Socrates was imprisoned and sentenced to death, he was happy. He accepted his destiny and never tortured his brain over it. In any case, whether one faces the situations of life like an ignorant person or a *jnani*, it is the quality of the soul that is responsible for the experience of destiny. There is only one way to meet destiny - one must have a great philosophy! Let it happen, if it happens and as it happens. Never worry about anything. Events take their destined course automatically.

This universe does not work according to one's wishes, it works on certain principles. There are certain laws of action and reaction. This world is perfect, and was made by a perfect being. God is all merciful. He has no imperfections. Whatever he does, He does to perfection. Whatever He has created, He has created with absolute laws. God has made a program for everyone; He has made one for me too. There is no use in worrying. One should just do one's karma and follow one's dharma, that is all. Kabir Das has said:

*This world is not a permanent place to stay.
It is a traveller's lodge in a foreign land.
This world is like a folded piece of paper,
Which dissolves even with a drop of water.*

*This world is a garden of thorns
In which one dies after being entangled.
This world is a thick, impassable jungle,
Which must be burned by fire to clear the way.
Kabir says, O men of wisdom, remember
That the safest abode is the name of the Lord.*

Is destiny or free will the decisive factor in life?

Swami Satyananda: Today, in the evening of my life, I have come to one conclusion. Destiny is the deciding factor, rather than personal will and effort. When one sows a seed and looks after it well, what is the deciding factor in the success of its growth: the seed, the soil or the care? The seed is the storehouse of destiny. According to its individual nature, the seed will bring wheat, carrots or cauliflowers. When one looks after it, puts it in the right soil and gives it proper water, this is called *purushartha*, personal effort. But personal effort will not produce a cauliflower from a wheat seed. Only the seed of a cauliflower will produce a cauliflower; that is its destiny.

Along with choice, one must have the power to achieve one's choice, which means that destiny alone is not totally applicable. Most people, however, are weak-willed and bound by their own desires and passions, so they have to accept destiny. Maya is built up on the basis of one's nature. If one can change it, one can change tragedy into comedy or comedy into tragedy. If one can change one's aspirations, ambitions and thoughts, one can definitely change the script, but it is very difficult.

For many years while studying Vedanta and Samkhya in their original texts, I would think about what cause and effect and destiny were and be confused. But today I can say very definitely that destiny is the ultimate factor in human life, and to change destiny is difficult. To change the quality of life is easy. If one attends satsang and does some yoga practices, one can change the quality of one's life, speech, thinking and behaviour. One's whole life can be changed, but

one cannot change the quality of one's personality. Destiny is inescapable and cannot be avoided.

Do yoga practices interfere with destiny?

Swami Satyananda: The purpose of yoga is not to interfere with destiny, but to change the karma before it is reconstituted. Yoga is concerned with the destiny that is still to be formed, not with the destiny that is already formed.

FREE WILL

How can there be free will if Ishwara, the supreme consciousness, determines all?

Swami Sivananda: The whole universe is determined by Ishwara's creative will. Ishwara is the basis of cosmic activity as well as individual action, yet is not involved in the individual's actions. Everything is determined in Ishwara; the past, the present and the future are all Ishwara's being alone. From the limited standpoint of the individual, there is an apparent freedom of action imposed by his individuality in spite of the fact of a changeless, universal law. Although the individual's freedom of thought and action is not the final truth, it assumes a relative importance.

Do humans have free will?

Swami Sivananda: The consciousness of the higher self makes one feel ever-free. The idea of freedom is ingrained in the mind of everyone, hidden in the consciousness of the Self. Even though a person may have nothing to eat, or be in adverse circumstances, there is a peculiar instinct that prompts him to think that he is always free.

He feels free because the *nitya-mukta*, ever-free, atman is behind his mind, sentiments and feelings. He knows that he is bound and encased in this tabernacle of flesh. He is fully aware that he is a slave of maya and avidya, limitation and ignorance, and yet at the same time something inside tells him that he is free. He has this double feeling, for in essence

he is the all-pervading mass of wisdom, *vijnanaghana atman*. He gets these flashes or glimpses of freedom, even while he labours under strained circumstances. There are encouragements for the struggling soul that come from within.

Even if he is dying and doctors have pronounced the case as absolutely hopeless, there is still a voice from within that says, "I am immortal; I am free." He cherishes an inherent feeling, "I am free, although I appear to be bound; this bondage is illusory." In the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:5–6), Sri Krishna speaks of the freedom of a person in doing karma:

*Uddharedaatmaanaatmaanam naatmaanamavasaadayet;
Aatmaiva hyaatmano bandhuraatmaiva ripuraatmanah.*

*Bandhuraatmaa'tmanastasya yenaatmaivaatmanaa jitah;
Aanaatmanastu shatrutve vartetaatmaiva shatruvat.*

Let a man lift himself by his own Self alone; let him not lower himself, for this self alone is the friend of oneself, and this self alone is the enemy of oneself. (5)

The self is the friend of the self for him, who has conquered himself by the Self; but to the unconquered self, this self stands in the position of an enemy like the external foe. (6)

A human is a free agent, *swatantra*, independent, in doing actions. Whatever one's present condition may be, one can have a glorious future through right exertion and right thinking. The *Kathopanishad* (1:3:13–14) echoes the same idea:

*Yachched vaan manase praajnastad yachchejjnaana aatmani;
Jnaanamaatmani mahati niyachchet tad yachchhchhchaanta
aatmani.*

*Uttishthata jaagrata praapya varaan nibodhata;
Kshurasya dhaaraa nishitaa duratyayaa durgam pathastat
kavayo vadanti.*

The wise man should merge speech in mind, mind in intellect, intellect in the great Self, the Atman, and the great Self in the peaceful Self. Awake, arise! (13)

Learn this wisdom from the great ones. As narrow as the razor's edge is that path, difficult to traverse and hard to tread, say the wise. (14)

Many have achieved success and greatness; many have reached the goal of life through right exertion, *purushartha*. This is true for all humans; they are ever free. May freedom be the goal of life! May all exert in the right direction to achieve freedom, the human birthright! May that supreme being, the *antaryamin*, guide all one's actions.

Can willpower and effort overcome a destiny that is already formed?

Swami Satyananda: One can develop willpower and one can make some amendments to the destiny of one's life, but destiny cannot be completely escaped as long as one is in the human body. One may be a great yogi, a perfected siddha, even an incarnation of divinity, an avatar, messiah, or prophet, but one still cannot totally override this destiny. According to history, even the prophets and saints were under the control of destiny to some extent when they were born. One can help matters become a little better by developing one's willpower as much as possible, but one should not think of completely escaping destiny. In order to escape destiny one would have to become a master of nature.

Given that everyone is subject to prarabdha karma, what should be the proper attitude towards people who commit crimes?

Swami Satyananda: The acts of a criminal or a murderer are not under his control. Whether a person is a murderer, thief, infidel or crook, it is not his karma alone it is also the karma of his parents. Thus, genetic, spiritual and

environmental influences can compel a person to commit a crime.

Why should the criminal be blamed when things are not under his control? Suppose I am under someone's control. What am I to do if he gives me a revolver and says, "Shoot that person!" I may not want to shoot him, but I will do it, because I am under his control. Similarly, what can that poor man do who is under the control of circumstances, the karma of his previous life and the biological factors that are transferred to him through his parents?

A criminal has no choice or control. If criminals were properly treated by society or the community, they could develop into great saints, as the basic qualities of a saint and a criminal are similar. The saint, however, has a different environmental atmosphere surrounding him. He receives proper treatment from his parents and society, whereas the criminal is always mistreated. He is put in jail and that is the basic mistake. Jails do not reform criminals, rather they make them into hardened criminals. Jails were created to contain criminals, as kings and rulers, administrators and governments had no alternative. If I committed a crime and was put in jail, would I come out reformed? No, I would come out with greater vengeance towards society.

There is no philosophy or system anywhere, East or West, whereby criminals are properly treated and reformed. They need biological treatment. It has been scientifically proven that genetic transfer is one of the major causes of crime. Until society is able to recognize the root causes of crime, how can there be any reformation? The divinity in a criminal has to be recognized. People with common sense and wisdom should neither hate the crime nor the criminal. Crime is the human being's longstanding weakness. When the human being was created, his first act was a crime. He learnt dharma much later from the saints and sages who guided him to start practising dharma.

Can the sanchita or accumulated karma be influenced before they form unalterable prarabdha karma?

Swami Satyananda: Whatever has been destined must happen to a certain extent. But destiny is not carved for all time; it differs from individual to individual. In a certain person the destiny is chalked out for twenty-five years, which means the blueprint is already made, so he cannot change it. After the twenty-five years, however, everything is undecided. I have seen karmas strictly binding a certain individual for nineteen years. I knew that at the end of the nineteenth year this particular suffering would finish, but what turn the prarabdha would take from the twentieth year was not yet known, as it was still unformed. Those who understand the law of karma can interfere with the unformed destiny by introducing a method, such as bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, religion or austerity, but one should know the karmas.

When the prarabdha is completely formed, the sufferings are absolutely set, something like a man who has committed many crimes receives the punishment of fifteen years imprisonment, but after that the turn of his prarabdha is unknown as it has not yet been formed. If one understands the entire range of karma, it can be seen that after fifteen years a particular type of karma is going to be rewarded in his life. The reward can be anything; that is up to destiny. One cannot decide it, but one knows which type of karma is being considered. That karma can still be changed after a day or two, a month or a year.

How does fate or destiny relate to free will?

Swami Sivananda: Fate is the result of the exercise of one's free will in the past. How far a person is a free agent of his actions must be understood in the light of Vedanta. Only then can a satisfactory answer and solution be found. In the West, various competent people have discussed this matter from various standpoints, but they have not come to any definite conclusions. They have taken only the present into consideration, which is a sad mistake. The present is only a

fragment of infinity. If the infinite past and infinite future are also taken into consideration, they will surely arrive at a definite conclusion that will bring peace and solace to the restless mind.

Determinists say that the human will is as much bound by the law of causation as the rest of the phenomena of the universe. Ethics, however, will fall to pieces if there is no freedom for the human being. Surely there cannot be moral responsibility where there is no freedom of action. How could a person be made to account for his actions unless he is a free agent of his deeds? How could reward or punishment be meted out with justice to a person who has done an action out of compulsion, but not out of free choice? Man would be like an automaton or a block of wood, his hands and feet chained down tightly.

The doctrine of karma is diametrically opposed to the doctrine of fatalism. Fatalism causes inertia, lethargy, weakness of will and bondage. It annihilates faith, induces terrible fear, destroys ethics and checks growth and evolution. On the other hand, the doctrine of karma is an incentive to act in order to better one's condition; it is a source of solace and gives an assurance of a broader and happier life. It presupposes freedom of will. Freedom is the essence of karma, which gives opportunities for growth and evolution.

The doctrine of karma offers a rational and scientific explanation of fate. It gives a positive word of assurance that although the present of which one is the creator is unalterable and irrevocable, one may better one's future by changing the thoughts, habits, tendencies and mode of action.

This gives great comfort, strength, encouragement and consolation to the desperate person. It provides a strong impetus to struggle and exert for improvement. Even a forlorn and helpless person is made cheerful when this doctrine of karma is understood. The doctrine of karma brings hope to the hopeless, help to the helpless, joy to the cheerless and new strength to the weak. It braces up a sunken

person, and is an ideal ‘pick-me-up’ for the depressed and gloomy.

It teaches, “Do not blame anybody when you are suffering. Do not accuse God; blame yourself first. Everyone will have to reap what they have sown in their previous birth. Your present sufferings are due to your own bad karma in the past life, so you are the author of this present state yourself. The present is unchangeable, so do not weep. Do not cry over spilt milk because nothing will be gained by doing so. Instead of weeping over the failure of crops during the last year, go on ploughing and there will be abundant rain and a rich harvest this year. In the same way, do virtuous actions now. Think and act rightly. You will have a brilliant and glorious future. Do not say, “Karma! Karma! My karma has brought me to this.” Exert; do purushartha. Do not yield to inertia. Do not bleat like a lamb. Roar *Om, Om, Om* like a lion of Vedanta. Apply yourself with zeal and enthusiasm, because you are the master of your own destiny.”



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BHAGAVAD GITA

1. Desire: Cause of Creation

(2:62) When a man thinks of objects, attachment to them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises. 30

(2:63) From anger comes delusion; from delusion, loss of memory; from loss of memory, the destruction of discrimination; from the destruction of discrimination he perishes. 30

2. Desire: Enemy of the Wise

(3:38) As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, so is this enveloped by that. 35

(3:39) O Arjuna, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is unappeasable, like fire. 35

(2:70) He attains peace in whom all desired objects enter as waters enter the ocean, which filled from all sides remains unmoved, but not the man who is full of desires. 47

(5:20) Resting in Brahman, with steady intellect and undeluded, the knower of Brahman neither rejoices on obtaining what is pleasant nor grieves on obtaining what is unpleasant. 65

(18:49) He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self, from whom desire has fled, by renunciation he attains the supreme state of freedom from action. 65

(2:55) When a man completely casts off, O Arjuna, all the desires of the mind and is satisfied in the self by the self, then he is said to be one of steady wisdom. 69

(6:18) When the perfectly controlled mind rests in the self only, free from longing for the objects of desire, then it is said, "He is united." 69

(3:17) But for that man who rejoices only in the self, who is satisfied with the self, who is content in the self alone, truly there is nothing to do. 69

(3:18) For him there is no interest whatsoever in what is done or what is not done; nor does he depend on any being for any object. 69

(4:19) He whose undertakings are all devoid of desires and selfish purposes, and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, him the wise call a sage. 71

3. Suffering

(5:22) The enjoyments that are born of action are the generators of pain only, for they have a beginning and an end, O Arjuna! The wise do not rejoice in them. 85

(18:5) Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be abandoned, but should be performed; sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise. 97

(11:45) I am delighted, having seen what has never been seen before; and yet my mind is distressed by fear. Show me Your previous form only, O God! Have mercy, O God of gods! O abode of the universe! 117

(11:46) I desire to see You as before, crowned, bearing a mace, with the discus in hand, in Your former form only, having four arms, O thousand-armed Cosmic Form! 117

(6:23) Let severance from union with pain be known by the name of yoga. This yoga should be practised with determination and with a non-despondent mind. 118

5. Destiny and Free Will

(6:5) Let a man lift himself by his own Self alone; let him not lower himself, for this self alone is the friend of oneself, and this self alone is the enemy of oneself. 160

(6:6) The self is the friend of the self for him, who has conquered himself by the Self; but to the unconquered self, this self stands in the position of an enemy like the external foe. 160

HOLY BIBLE

1. Desire: Cause of Creation

(Proverbs 13:12) Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. 12

(Proverbs 27:7) He who is sated loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet. 15

KATHOPANISHAD

5. Destiny and Free Will

(1:3:13) The wise man should merge speech in mind, mind in intellect, intellect in the great Self, the Atman, and the great Self in the peaceful Self. Awake, arise! 161

(1:2:14) Learn this wisdom from the great ones. As narrow as the razor's edge is that path, difficult to traverse and hard to tread, say the wise. 161

MAHABHARATA

1. Desire: Cause of Creation

(13:93:47) When one desire cherished by a person becomes satisfied, immediately there originates another whose satisfaction is sought and which pierces him like an arrow. 27

2. Desire: Enemy of the Wise

(12:217:36) As a weaver drives his threads into a cloth by means of his shuttle, similarly the threads that constitute the fabric of the universe are woven by the shuttle of desire. 37

MANUSMRITI

1. Desire: Cause of Creation

(2:4) Not a single act here appears ever to be done by a man free from desire; for whatever a man does is the result of the impulse of desire. 33

POETRY BY KABIR DAS

5. Destiny and Free Will

This world is not a permanent place to stay.
It is a traveller's lodge in a foreign land.
This world is like a folded piece of paper,
Which dissolves even with a drop of water.
This world is a garden of thorns
In which one dies after being entangled.
This world is a thick, impassable jungle,
Which must be burned by fire to clear the way.
Kabir says, O men of wisdom, remember
That the safest abode is the name of the Lord.

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POETRY BY MIRABAI

2. Desire: Enemy of the Wise

What can I say? I have no words
To convey my longing;
Pray come, and quench
This fire that's searing my heart.
Lord, You know all;
Then why do you torment me thus?
Pray, have mercy,
Come and meet Mira
Who, for ever your slave,
In love surrenders at Your feet.

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RAMACHARITAMANAS OF TULSIDAS

5. Destiny and Free Will

(Ayodhyakanda, doha 77)

Considering an individual's good and bad actions,
The Lord weighs the cause and sanctions the result.
The result is the outcome of the action in totality,
The scriptures, justice and everything confirm it.

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RAMAYANA OF SAGE VALMIKI

5. Destiny and Free Will

(Ayodhyakanda, 22:22) Joy and sorrow, fear and anger, gain and loss, birth and death, and whatever similar experience comes to a particular individual, that is unquestionably the work of providence. 153

YOGA SUTRAS OF SAGE PATANJALI

1. Desire: Cause of Creation

- (4:10) There is no beginning to them and the desire to live is eternal. 18
- (2:9) Abhinivesha, fear of death, is the desire for life sustained by its own force which dominates even the learned. 18
- (4:24) Although the mind is variegated by innumerable vasanas, it acts for purusha because it works in association. 24
- (1:15) When an individual becomes free of craving for sense objects which he has experienced as well as those of which he has heard, that state of consciousness is vairagya, non-attachment. 25
- (4:11) Since cause and effect, support and object are bound together, by their disappearance that also disappears. 26

3. Suffering

- (2:15) In the case of one who has discrimination, viveka, all is painful because of pains due to change, acute suffering, samskaras, and also due to gunas and vrittis in opposition. 75
- (2:12) This storehouse of karmas, karmashaya, which is the root cause of afflictions, is experienced in the present and future births. 80
- (2:13) So long as the root of karmashaya, the storehouse of karmas, is there, it ripens and gives birth, class, span of life and experience. 81
- (2:3) Ignorance, I-feeling, liking, disliking and fear of death are the pains or afflictions. 82
- (2:17) The union between the seer and the seen is the cause of *heya*, that which is to be avoided. 83
- (2:24) The cause of union is avidya. 83

(2:5) Avidya is mistaking the non-eternal, impure, negative and noumenon for the eternal, pure, good and atman respectively.	83
(2:6) Asmita is the identity of purusha with buddhi.	84
(2:7) Raga is the liking accompanying pleasure.	87
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(1:3:11) Desires are of two kinds, pure and impure. The impure desires are the cause of transmigration, while the pure desires serve to destroy it.	11
(4:54:2) Desire or will is situated in the mind or mental part of the one eternal, universal and spiritual substance of God.	12
(5:17:5) The desire to enjoy external objects is verily the bondage of the soul, while indifference to worldly enjoyments constitutes freedom in this living state.	20

2. Desire: Enemy of the Wise

(2:9:30) The current of desires flows in between the two channels of good and evil; by the exertion of activity one must turn it to the right course.	59
(4:54:16) He who wants to destroy his desire can do it in a trice, by forgetting the thought of his desired object.	62
(6(2):160:22) The web of desires that I have been fondly weaving so long proved at last to be fragile and frail. Hence people of firm minds learn betimes to abandon their desires for the whole range of visible objects.	63
(1:3:9) The absence of desires leads to the extinction of mental actions, in the same manner as the absence of cold is conducive to the dissolution of small particles of ice.	63
(4:57:19) The man bound to his desires is a bondsman, and the person freed from them is set free from his slavery.	64
(4:57:20–21) Forsake first your foul, tamasic desires. Then be freed from your desire of worldly possessions. Foster your better wishes next, and finally, be inclined towards pure and holy teachings. After having conducted yourself with pure desires, get rid of these at the end. Then, freed from all desires, be inclined	

towards and united with your intellect, knowing all and longing for nothing. 66

(3:22:5) The desire of jivanmuktas is not properly any desire at all, since it is the pure desire relating to universal wealth and happiness. 71

5. Destiny and Free Will

(2:9:4) The good and bad results which proceed from the accomplished acts are expressed by the word destiny. 151

Glossary

Abhinivesha – fear of death; one of the five kleshas described in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. See Klesha.

Acharya – spiritual preceptor, master.

Adhi – mental pain. See Adhibhautika. See Adhidaivika. See Adhyatmika.

Adhibhautika – suffering which proceeds from extrinsic causes, such as other people, beasts, birds or inanimate objects; in Samkhya philosophy, one of the three miseries caused by avidya (ignorance).

Adhidaivika – extrinsic suffering due to supernatural causes; environmental hardship and pain; in Samkhya philosophy one of the three miseries caused by avidya (ignorance).

Adhyatmika – pertaining to the atma (soul); suffering which proceeds from intrinsic causes, such as disorders of the body and mind; pain which is coming out of one’s own being due to either unconscious psychological frustration or emotional tension; in Samkhya philosophy, spiritual hardship and pain, one of the three miseries caused by avidya (ignorance).

Adrishta – unseen, unknown; that which is beyond the reach of observation or consciousness.

Ahamkara – faculty of ego, awareness of the existence of ‘I’. See Antahkarana.

Ahara – third instinct; craving satisfaction, food or nourishment.

Ajnana – ignorance of reality; non-cognizance; unawareness; one of the five kleshas described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. See Klesha.

Alambana – primal idea or basic cause; support.

Anadi – beginningless.

Anahata chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the sternum; associated physically with the cardiac plexus, heart and lungs, mentally with emotion, especially love, and spiritually with atma, the spirit. See Chakra.

Ananda – pure bliss; natural state of consciousness.

Anishta – undesired; bad, evil.

Antahkarana – literally, 'inner tool', inner organ of consciousness, consisting of: ahamkara, manas, buddhi and chitta.

Antaryamin – inner ruler; the supreme being present in every object of creation and guiding all creatures.

Aparigraha – abstention from greed; one of the five yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Yama.

Apta kama – one whose desires have been fulfilled; one who has renounced all worldly desires and attachments; a realized sage.

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother, who was the son of Lord Indra and Kunti. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, he received a divine revelation from Sri Krishna.

Artha – prosperity; material need; accomplishment; attainment in all spheres of life; one of the four purusharthas. See Purushartha.

Ashram – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour.

Ashrama dharma – the special duties of each stage of life.

Ashtanga yoga – the eight limbs of yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi; the eight limbs of yoga presented by Swami Sivananda: serve, love give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize.

- Asmita** – notion of ‘I’ or ‘I-ness’; awareness of ‘I am’ superimposed on the body, action and mind; the feeling of ‘I’ identified with an action; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*. See Klesha.
- Atma, atman** – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life; highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul.
- Atmajnana** – direct knowledge of the self.
- Avatara** – descent or incarnation of God to the mortal plane.
- Avidya** – ignorance of reality; ignorance. See Klesha.
- Bhagavad Gita** – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga.
- Bhakta** – devotee.
- Bhakti** – complete devotion to the higher reality of life; love for all beings; devotion as service; channelling of emotion to a higher force.
- Bhaya** – second instinct; fear; fear of death, fear of losing one’s identity and associations.
- Bhima** – the second Pandava brother in the *Mahabharata* epic, son of Vayu and Kunti.
- Bhoga** – sensual enjoyment; external experience.
- Bhranti** – confusion; mistake; false idea or impression, wrong notion, delusion.
- Bhrantisukha** – illusory pleasure, deluding happiness.
- Bhrigu Samhita** – a selection of prose as a code of conduct, written by Sage Bhrigu.
- Bhukti** – material enjoyment.
- Brahmacharya** – being absorbed in higher consciousness; sensual restraint; celibacy; conduct suitable for proceeding to the highest state of existence; one of the yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as resulting in indomitable courage. See Yama.

- Brahmajnana** – experience and knowledge of Brahman, pure Consciousness or the Absolute; divine knowledge.
- Brahman** – etymologically ‘ever expanding, limitless consciousness’; name of Supreme Consciousness or cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; God as creator; monistic concept of Absolute Reality.
- Buddha** – the enlightened one; generally referring to the founder of Buddhism.
- Buddhi** – discerning, discriminating aspect of mind; aspect of mind closest to pure consciousness; one of the four parts of the antahkarana, or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.
- Chakra** – circle, wheel or vortex; pranic/psychic centre; confluence point of energy flows (nadis) in the body; the seven major chakras for descent of divine energy or for human evolution are sahasrara, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana and mooladhara.
- Chela** – disciple, one who follows the path.
- Chitta** – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; storehouse of memory or samskaras; one of the four parts of the antahkarana, or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.
- Daiva sampatti** – positive qualities, divine virtues.
- Dama** – control of the outer senses; self-command through self-restraint and curbing the passions.
- Dareshana** – desire for relationship with another, particularly emotional connection and sexual interaction.
- Devi** – female deity, goddess.
- Dharana** – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding the mind to one point.
- Dharma** – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness.
- Dharmaputra** – literally, ‘son of dharma’; an epithet used to describe Yudhisthira, a character in the *Mahabharata* epic; one who observes righteousness.

Dhyana – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form, thought or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga.

Dosha – three humours of the body described in ayurveda: mucus (kapha), bile (pitta) and wind (vata). Their imbalance prevents the flow of energy in sushumna nadi.

Drashta – witness, uninvolved observer, onlooker, seer; the consciousness which knows what is going on; the inner self.

Draupadi – great devotee of Sri Krishna, daughter of King Drupada of Panchala and wife of the five Pandava brothers, in the *Mahabharata* epic.

Drishya – the seen.

Dukha – suffering, pain.

Dweshha – repulsion, aversion; hatred, enmity, dislike; one of the five causes of suffering (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as aversion to the unpleasant. See Klesha.

Gandharvas – celestial beings who engage in musical arts, dancing and singing.

Grihastha ashrama – the second stage of life according to the ancient vedic ashrama tradition, i.e. household or married life from 25 to 50 years of age.

Guna – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti are sattwa, rajas and tamas.

Harischandra – name of a king of the solar dynasty who was famous for his liberality, probity and unflinching adherence to truth. He was put on 'fire' through a test by Sage Vishvamitra to prove his noble qualities. Finally, the worthy king was elevated to heaven along with his subjects.

Heya – that which is to be avoided.

Iccha – wish, desire, will.

Iccha shakti – creative force or that desire which is the first manifestation of the greater mind.

Ida nadi – a major pranic channel running from the left side of mooladhara chakra to the left side of ajna chakra,

governing the left side of the body and the right side of the brain. The ida energy flow criss-crosses the spine through the major chakras between mooladhara and ajna, conducting the passive aspect of prana manifesting as the mental force, lunar force or chitta shakti; also called chandra nadi as the lunar energy flows through it.

Indriya – sense organ; power of the senses.

Ishta – object of desire; the chosen ideal; the particular form of God one is devoted to.

Ishwara – higher reality; God; non-changing, indestructible principle or quality.

Jara – old age.

Jati – lineage, race, caste; community; relative.

Jiva – principle of life; individual or personal soul; living being.

Jivanmukta – liberated in life; an enlightened person, a person purified by true knowledge of the Supreme Reality and freed from future births while still embodied.

Jivatma, jivatman – individual or personal soul.

Jnana, jnanam – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience.

Jnana yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and investigation of abstract and speculative ideas; leading a discriminative lifestyle, living with wisdom.

Jnanendriya – organ of sense perceptions and knowledge; five in number, viz. ears, eyes, nose, tongue and skin.

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life.

Kaivalya – final liberation; highest state of samadhi; that state of consciousness which is beyond duality.

Kalpa – aeon, era; one day in the life of Brahma (4,320,000,000 human years); rules and regulations of religious work; seed.

Kalpa vriksha – wish-fulfilling tree; a psychic centre closely linked with anahata chakra.

Kalpana – imagination; idea conceived in the mind.

Kama – emotional, sensual love; lust.

Kamsa, King – a tyrannical king killed by Sri Krishna.

Kapha – mucus, phlegm, one of the three humours (doshas) described in ayurveda. See Dosha.

Karana sharira – causal body; also called anandamaya kosha.

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect.

Karma yoga – yogic path of action; union with the Supreme Consciousness through action; action without attachment to the fruits of action.

Karmashaya – deep layers of consciousness where the karmas are stored in the form of impressions, symbols or archetypes; repository of karma; aggregate of work done.

Karmendriya – motor organ; there are five physical organs of action, viz. vocal cords, hands, feet, genital organ and anus.

Klesha – pain, affliction, suffering; five afflictions or causes of suffering described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, viz. avidya (ignorance), asmita (sense of 'I' identity), raga (attraction), dwesha (aversion), and abhinivesha (fear of death); in yoga the five kleshas are the sources of all suffering or troubles, with ignorance being considered the chief klesha.

Kriya shakti – power or faculty of acting.

Kriyamana karma – karma being performed now; the effects of the deeds of the present life which are to be experienced in the future; literally, 'which is being done'; also called agami karma.

Kunti – daughter of Yadava and the first wife of Pandu in the *Mahabharata* epic.

Laya yoga – literally, union by absorption; yoga of conscious dissolution of individuality.

Lila – literally, 'play'; activity of prakriti and its three gunas.

Lokeshana – desire for name and fame; attachment to any expectations from people or the world.

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Veda Vyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it.

Mahapurusha – great man; sage; person who has realized the totality of consciousness.

Mahat – greater mind; the total mind which includes manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara; universal intellect.

Mahatattwa – literally, ‘the great element’; great essence.

Mahatma – literally, ‘great soul’; used with reference to a person who has destroyed the ego and realized the self as one with all.

Mahatvakanksha – ambition; a desire that manifests in the realm of *mahat*, the greater mind, or buddhi.

Maithuna – physical union; the first basic instinct; copulation; fusion of male and female energies.

Mamta – feeling of mineness; sense of belonging, ownership.

Manipura chakra – literally, ‘city of jewels’; psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the navel; associated with the solar plexus and digestive organs and mentally with willpower; source of vitality and energy. See Chakra.

Manusmriti – a highly respected book on dharma shastra (code of conduct), indicating one’s duty to self and society and defining the purushartha; compiled by Sage Bhrigu, believed to be a disciple of Manu; literally, ‘a text based on memories of the teachings of Manu’.

Mathura – name of an ancient town which is the birthplace of Sri Krishna, situated on the right bank of the river Yamuna.

Maya – means by which Brahman creates the phenomenal world; power of creation; illusive power; in Vedanta philosophy, the two powers of maya are: 1. the power of veiling, and 2. the power of projection; in Samkhya philosophy, another name for Prakriti.

Mirabai – (born 1502) Indian poet saint devoted to Sri Krishna.

- Moha** – delusion; infatuation.
- Moksha** – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya.
- Mooladhara chakra** – the lowest psychic/pranic centre in the human body; situated in the perineal floor in men and the cervix in women; associated physically with the coccygeal plexus, excretory and reproductive organs, and mentally with the instinctive nature; spiritually it is the seat of kundalini. See Chakra.
- Mrityu** – death, one of the three inevitable conditions of life.
- Muhurta** – instant; an auspicious time.
- Mukti** – release, liberation, final absolution of the consciousness from the chain of birth and death and from the illusion of maya.
- Mumukshutva** – intense yearning for liberation.
- Muni** – one who contemplates; one who has conquered the mind; one who maintains silence or stillness of mind.
- Nada** – sound; subtle sound or vibration created by the union of the Shiva and Shakti tattwas; the first manifestation of the unmanifested Absolute.
- Nidra** – fourth instinct; deep sleep; isolation from the mind and senses; disassociation.
- Nirmanā chitta** – the higher mind where there is no enjoyment of pleasure and pain; consciousness beyond the mind.
- Nirvana** – cessation of suffering; final liberation or emancipation in Buddhist thought.
- Nishkama karma** – action done without desire; action without expectation of fruits and done without personal interest or egoism. This type of action purifies the mind and heart without creating new bondage.
- Nitya mukta** – eternally free; the Supreme Being.
- Niyama** – observance of rules or rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation; the second step of the eight limbs (ashtanga yoga) of Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

- Pandavas** – sons of Pandu: Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Sahadev and Nakula; the five brothers who held an inter-family feud against the Kauravas as recorded in the *Mahabharata* epic. See Mahabharata, Kauravas.
- Paramatma** – cosmic soul or consciousness; supreme self; the atma of the entire universe; God.
- Parigraha** – acquisition, collecting and keeping.
- Parinama** – transformation, change.
- Parivrajaka** – wandering mendicant; ascetic; stage of life lasting for twelve years in the traditional training of a sannyasin.
- Patanjali, Sage** – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga including ashtanga yoga.
- Pingala nadi** – a major pranic channel in the body which conducts the dynamic pranic force manifesting as prana shakti from the right side of mooladhara chakra, criss-crossing the spine through the major chakras to the right side of ajna chakra; associated with the mundane realm of experience and externalized awareness; also called surya nadi as the solar energy flows through it.
- Pitta** – bile, one of the three humours (doshas) described in ayurveda. See Dosha.
- Poorva karma** – previous karma.
- Prakriti** – nature; manifested shakti; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; counterpart of purusha in Samkhya philosophy.
- Prana** – vital energy force sustaining life and creation, permeating the whole of creation and existing in both the macrocosmos and microcosmos.
- Prarabdha karma** – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; previous karmas which have matured enough to give fruit; that portion of one's actions which is bound to fructify in the present life and cannot be averted.
- Pratyahara** – restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the

domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage of ashtanga yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Preta – ghost

Purusha – literally, ‘the one who lives in the city (of the body)’; the soul; pure consciousness according to Samkhya philosophy, undefiled and unlimited by contact with prakriti or matter; can also refer to a man or a human being.

Purushartha – human attainment; the four basic needs or desires to be fulfilled in life, viz. artha (wealth), kama (desire), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation).

Putreshana – desire for progeny, for one’s own children.

Raga – passion; affection; attachment; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* as attraction or attachment to what gives pleasure. See Klesha.

Raja yoga – the supreme yoga; union through control of the mental processes and concentration of the mind; the most authoritative text is Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* which contain ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path.

Rajas – one of the three gunas or attributes; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement. See Guna.

Rakshasa – demon, evil spirit.

Ramacharitamanas – a version of the *Ramayana* written by Tulsidas. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India.

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version was composed by Sage Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in seven chapters.

Ravana – the ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Sita, Sri Rama’s wife, and was slain by Sri Rama; his ten heads symbolize attachment to the phenomenal reality.

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self.

- Sadhaka** – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant
- Sadhana** – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly.
- Sadhu** – good or holy person, sage, saint.
- Sakshi** – that which observes the phenomenal reality without being affected at all; witness. See Drashta.
- Sama** – equanimity.
- Samadhi** – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga.
- Samatvam** – equipoise.
- Samkhya** – one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. Attributed to Sage Kapila, Samkhya is a spiritual science based on the division of all existence into the two eternal principles of purusha and prakriti, and the twenty-three elements of creation; the philosophical basis of the yoga system.
- Samsara** – illusory world; the course or circuit of worldly life; unending cycle of birth and death.
- Samskara** – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way.
- Sanchita karma** – stored karma; accumulated experiences and involvement in life which have been registered by the consciousness and although not influencing one's life at the moment, will manifest in the future.
- Sandhi** – union; juncture; interval; pause.
- Sankalpa** – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; willpower.
- Sankalpa shakti** – the power of one-pointed awareness, one-pointed desire, one-pointed will.
- Sannyasin** – one who has taken sannyasa initiation, surrendering everything to the guru and the spiritual journey.
- Santosha** – contentment, satisfaction; one of the five niyamas enumerated in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali.

- Satsanga** – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; spiritual association; association with the wise and the good.
- Sattwa** – one of the three gunas, or attributes of nature; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium and purity. See Guna.
- Shakti** – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman.
- Shankara** – name of Shiva, referring to his auspicious nature.
- Shanti** – peace, tranquility; absence of passion, complete indifference to all worldly enjoyment.
- Shiva** – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic, original source of yoga; Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality.
- Shoonya** – void, state of transcendental consciousness; space behind the eyebrow centre.
- Shuddha bhoga** – pure enjoyment; enjoyment without craving or desire.
- Siddhartha** – name of Buddha before he became ‘the enlightened one’.
- Sita** – daughter of King Janaka and the wife of Sri Rama, as recorded in the epic *Ramayana*.
- Sri Krishna** – literally, ‘black’ or ‘dark’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*.
- Sri Rama** – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king.

Sukha – pleasure, enjoyment.

Sutra – thread; condensed statements strung together to give an outline of a philosophy, such as the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali.

Swabhava – one's own essential nature.

Swadhsthana chakra – literally, 'one's own abode'; second psychic/pranic centre; located in the coccyx; associated with the sacral plexus and governing the urogenital system; the storehouse of subconscious impressions. See Chakra.

Swami – literally, 'master over the mind'; master of the self; title of sannyasins.

Swatantra – independent.

Tamas – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; inertia, stability; ignorance, darkness; unwillingness to change. See Guna.

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana including mantra, yantra and other esoteric practices.

Tapas – austerity; a specific type of pain and hardship; this pain is of three types: *adhyatmika*, spiritual, *adhidevika*, natural or environmental, and *adhibhautika*, physical.

Tapasya – practice of austerity.

Titiksha – endurance; bearing heat and cold and other pairs of opposites without complaint.

Tripti – satisfaction.

Tushti – satisfaction, gratification.

Tyagi – one who has renounced.

Upanishads – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally one hundred and eight in number, containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, 'to sit near and listen' (to the spiritual teacher); regarded as the source of Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya philosophies.

- Vairagya** – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion.
- Vairagya dharma** – the inclination born of dispassion, which arises at a young age.
- Vasana tyaga** – renunciation of subtle desires.
- Vasishtha, Sage** – a celebrated rishi and seer of the Vedas; author of many vedic hymns. His teachings are recorded in *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the greatest expositions of jnana yoga.
- Vata** – wind, gas; one of the three humours (doshas) described in ayurveda. See Dosha.
- Vedanta** – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, ‘the last part of the Vedas’; the school of Hindu thought based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita).
- Vichara** – reflection; enquiry into the nature of the self, Brahman or truth.
- Vijnanaghana atman** – the all-pervading mass of wisdom; abode of knowledge; literally, ‘cloud of spiritual knowledge’; the atma which is the abode of pure knowledge
- Vikalpa** – fancy, unfounded belief, imagination; oscillation of the mind; one of the five modifications of mind listed in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. See Vritti.
- Vitteshana** – the desire for money, material possessions or security.
- Viveka** – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding; sense of discrimination between the self and what is not the self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha.
- Vritti** – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern; a particular state or condition.
- Vyadhi** – disease, sickness, illness; one of the unavoidable sufferings of life.
- Yajna** – sacrifice; yajna consists of three syllables, ‘ya’, ‘ja’ and ‘na’, which refer to the three processes involved in every act performed and which must be balanced – production:

‘ya’, distribution: ‘ja’, and assimilation: ‘na’; yajna has three components: ritual or worship, satsanga and unconditional giving.

Yama – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the mind tranquil; first stage of the eight limbs of yoga (ashtanga yoga) of Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*.

Yoga – union; the root is yuj, meaning ‘to join’, ‘to yoke’; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy.

Yoga Shastras – the yoga system of philosophy and practice where the chief aim is to teach the means for the human soul to unite completely with the supreme spirit; elaborate rules for the proper practice of concentration of mind.

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali.

Yogi – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice.

Yudhishthira – literally, ‘firm in battle’; name of the eldest Pandava brother in the *Mahabharata* epic.

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